

THE
NARROWING
WIND

INTERCOLLEGIATE
LITERARY
FELLOWSHIP

PRIZE NOVELS

SEVENTEENTH SUMMER

By Maureen Daly

HEDGE AGAINST THE SUN

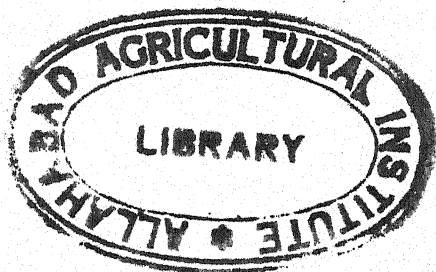
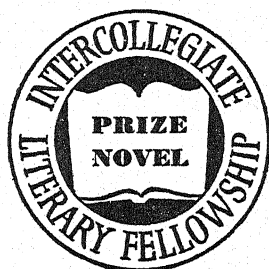
By Barbara Bentley

THE NARROWING WIND

By Catherine Lawrence

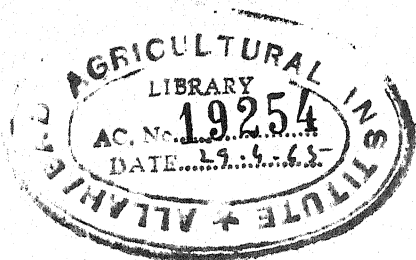
THE NARROWING WIND

By CATHERINE LAWRENCE



DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
NEW YORK

1944



COPYRIGHT, 1944
By DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY, INC.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM
WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE PUBLISHER

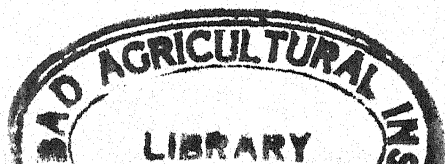
Published October 1944
Second Printing October 1944

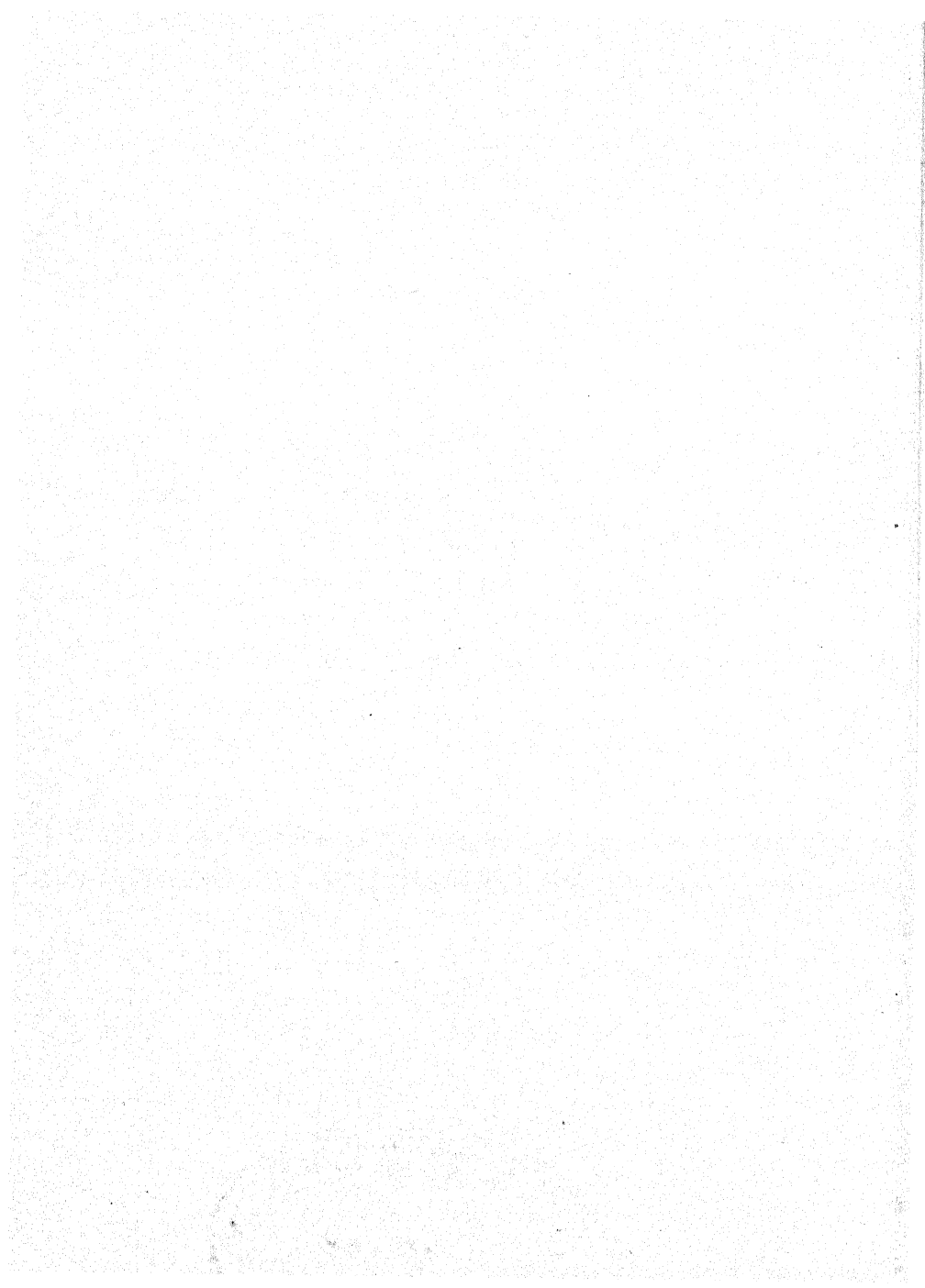
★ ★ ★ ★

THIS BOOK IS COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED. IT IS
MANUFACTURED UNDER WARTIME CONDITIONS IN CON-
FORMITY WITH GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS CONTROL-
LING THE USE OF PAPER AND OTHER MATERIALS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

TO MY MOTHER
LILLY STONE LAWRENCE





Chapter 1

It was not quite dawn—a cold Saturday morning in November. The other farms along the road to town lay in the dark, but light sprang from the Kearneys' kitchen window. Shane could have been seen through the window by any early passer-by, standing at the kitchen table making the sandwiches she would eat for lunch. Quickly she went to the sink and to the pantry, her steps making her red hair swing against her cheeks. It was a quarter to five. At twenty minutes after five the milk train would leave the depot for Chicago. The kitchen light died, and the house sank back into sleep, as she stepped out into the cold darkness.

This was the sixth day she had got up earlier than any farmer to go to Chicago, and she was not yet used to it. She had to stop on the doorstep, push the package of lunch into her coat pocket and pull her old fur collar close around her neck. Although she knew the road well enough to walk it by heart, her eyes, untrained for the darkness, sought the pale smudge of gravel that led from the Kearney barns to the highway. As she stalled on the doorstep, she was not looking for the road as much as she was listening for the familiar sounds from the barns, the chickens scuffling in the coop, the thud of the horse's hoof, his forelegs shivering, the blowing of his frosty lip, the

prickly straw stirring on the barnyard floor, blown lightly by the coldwater November breeze. With everything hid from her in the dark, these faint sounds were like an invisible someone, whispering to her to get away.

As she set out past the barns, she was jarred by the striking of her high heels on the frozen mud. The ground seemed to rise and fall and rise to the bottoms of her feet, for she was sleepy and the chill air stiffened her body. A few stars still impaled the sky. They seemed to follow her, bounding back and forth with the jerk of her steps, while the shapes of the barns and the narrow two-story farmhouse, the caved-in car shed, the stripped branches of the apple trees and the teetering posts of the barbed wire fence fell back out of sight.

Once the farm was behind her and she was going along the flat, narrow highway to town, she set her short legs a fast pace. There was plenty of time to get to the station before the train left, but the dead, dark silence of the surrounding country made her feel the exciting alarm that the train might leave without her. She walked as fast as she could, because she felt that hurrying to the station was as much a part of the job as hurrying to keep up with the rate on the tachometer line in the factory. She enjoyed driving herself to make time, because she had never done it before. It was so exciting that she had to talk to herself about it, "Gotta hurry, gotta make that train, gotta keep up with the rate." It felt so good to be running away to Chicago, even before the farmers got up, that she wanted to laugh.

Each breath pressed her ribs, then rushed out mechanically, until the machine abruptly stopped, and she stood still, her breath held in her. Through the graying night she saw a man come toward her, his pale face tipped down, wandering back

and forth over the highway, as if he were searching for something. He was singing to himself. Shane recognized her father, and she remembered, then, what her mother had said the night before. "Your father's carrying on tonight. He's being Irish."

She couldn't cut across the field, for she wouldn't have time to crawl between the barbed wire of the fence before he saw her. Waiting stock-still at the side of the road, she watched him coming.

"Oh, Mavornin in the mornin', there's a light in your sweet eyes," he sang, his voice drawn with sentiment and strained by fatigue.

As he came close enough for her to recognize the features of his face through the dim light, his pale eyes with the moist, dark rims, his thin nose and the chin that twisted up, she whispered to herself, like a child practicing what she will say. "I see you, Pa. I got a job now, Pa, in Chicago. Don't forget you got to feed the chickens and the horse." But she said nothing aloud to him. Just as he was passing her, he took a couple of steps back and sideways, trying to get his balance, and he stopped singing. If he came toward her, slobbering his Irish brogue and reaching for her coat sleeve, she would scream; not because she was afraid of him, but because she couldn't bear trying to be patient with him. She couldn't waste the time to bawl him out or humor him or help him, when the train would be pulling out any minute.

He must have known that she didn't want him to stop her, for he put his arms behind his swaying back and tried to walk nonchalantly on, as he began a new song at a higher pitch. "O'Neill, he was a darlin' man, O'Neill, he was a proud one . . ." Obliging, he had pretended not to see her. As Shane started running down the road to town, he slowly,

clumsily pivoted around and, blinking, watched in the direction she had gone. "It's the blood in me, an' the blood in ye," he whined, abandoning his song and staring through the early morning. Laboriously he turned around to go home, repeating the first song, "Oh, Mavornin in the mornin'," in his softly half-blind, drunken way.

The monstrous train ground its way through the half-lit countryside. Shane, sitting on the river side of the coach, let the old fur collar slip from her shoulders and searched through the dirty, electric-yellow reflections in the window for the dark flow of landscape. While she watched the mottled window and waited for the conductor to come down the aisle behind her looking for her ticket, she turned over in her mind the thought of how everything would be on the farm today while she worked in the factory. It was the first time her father had got full since she had started the job.

One day, every week, as regular as her mother's going to church, her father got drunk. The other days of the week, they could count on his working hard, but ever since she could remember, he broke away the one day. And that day her Mother and Shane and Katie and Edward, as long as they were living at home, worked a little harder to make up for his being Irish. He acted in a peculiar way the morning after a binge, and he seemed to act that way to annoy Mrs. Kearney. He would never stay put. Instead of going right up to the attic to sleep it off, he would wander around the place, go out to the barn and fumble with a harness or feed the chickens, before feeding time. Sometimes he would go up in the attic and Mrs. Kearney, who would be working in the kitchen, was supposed to think that for once he wasn't going to bother her,

but then he would turn up in the parlor doorway in his underwear, like a child, whining about some foolish thing. He would tell her she was working too hard, or that she should never forget he had the blood of the O'Neills in him. Mrs. Kearney would just let him rave because she wasn't going to satisfy him by showing how much he annoyed her.

Those mornings that he didn't want to sober up, he loved to talk to Shane. When she was a little girl, she picked vegetables and sold them at a roadside stand which Edward, her brother, had rigged up for her. Late in the fall, she would sit on a stool by the pile of pumpkins, in a red sweater and overalls, her hands dirty and cold but her cheeks bright as winter apples, waiting for somebody to drive by. Her father, home from his weekly visit to town, would carry a basket of onions out to her, just as an excuse to tell Shane wild stories about the rebels at the time when Queen Elizabeth was after the Irish: how they weren't afraid of the Queen and went to her bare-headed and rough-looking; and how an O'Neill died in a fight once when he was drunk. He would rave until Mrs. Kearney called Shane to come in and help her, and then her father would tag in after her, trying to get her to listen to the finish of his tale. Mrs. Kearney paid no attention to him, but once she did say to Shane when her father was going on about the O'Neills, "An' my forefathers was Ulster Scottish. Never forget that." Mrs. Kearney had looked at Mr. Kearney coldly.

"Yes," he said, "an' your Orangemen would rather of spilled their blood than mix it, but there was that one time in yer life when ye couldn't say no." He laughed, a sneezing little sound, and went up to the attic leaving them with the wonderful peace that meant he was really sleeping it off. Mrs. Kearney, who was mending at the time, said quietly, after a moment of silence,

"Your father don't talk of those things until he drinks." She broke off the thread with a yank. Then her mother told her something she had never known before. "He left Ireland, and I left my home, and we came here, because we *would* marry." It was hard to imagine her father and mother, the young couple in the wedding picture on the parlor sideboard, so much in love with each other that they ran away from home so they could be together. "Away from Ireland, you and Edward and Katie are good Protestants, however wild your father may be."

To hear her mother say that about Edward and Katie had bothered Shane. It was like Mrs. Kearney to say they were all good Protestants, because she wished they were. Her mother was a good Protestant. She liked to go to church every Sunday, but Shane went only because it seemed to comfort her mother, and Edward and Katie hated going. Edward would probably have laughed at his mother, the way his father did, if he heard her saying he was a good Protestant. Shane didn't really know Edward very well. When she was still a little girl, he had gone to Pittsburgh. Before that, she remembered only his coming and going in a Model T Ford, always wearing old mechanic's clothes and a cap pulled back on one side, with a paper rose stuck in the visor. As far as she knew, he had never paid any attention to the church. She knew Katie, her sister who lived in Chicago, much better. Katie wasn't a good Protestant either, but that was another story.

The conductor's yellow, chicken-skinned hand was plucking tickets. He snatched Shane's and, shoulders bent, proceeded knock-kneed down the aisle. As soon as the ticket was gone, the new shaky feeling that she was on her own, her own boss now, pulled her thoughts about the farm away from her like the tattered trees and barns along the Des Plaines river rushing

backwards. Bracing her feet against the seat in front of her, she closed her hands over the ends of her patent leather purse, tracing the thin, gluey fraying of leather at the canvas cracks. She shivered and yawned. The yawn made her warm. Glancing sideways, she saw the passengers who were sitting around her twitch, as if in their sleep, with the rumbling and jerking.

To keep down her excitement of waiting to get to the job, she would try to act as indifferent as these people did. She took a square mirror and a lipstick from her purse. First, she pulled the top off the lipstick and screwed up the red stump, then rubbed the mirror on the thick folds of her coat sleeve. Eyes lowered, holding the mirror close to her precisely half-opened mouth, she began to push the salve-smooth red over the full bow of her upper lip. When a hitch of the train startled her hand, she waited a moment before bearing down again. That was over. Her lips pressed together between her teeth. Making sure that it was an even job, she held the mirror closer to see the result. At the center of her upper lip was an oval that swelled a little over the underlip, making her mouth seem uncommonly soft, like a child's. Next, she found in her purse a large metal compact, blue paint flaked from its cold, flat surface, from which she took a large powder puff to flap over the high-colored skin of her cheeks. When she slammed the compact shut, a powder cloud drifted over the shoulders of the man sitting in front of her. What would the guy's wife think of the lady's powder on his clothes? She had to smile. When she smiled, it was not the shape of her face or of her mouth that was noticeable, but the color and shape of her eyes. They were a strong blue, and underneath them her cheekbones curved like the edge of a shell.

The smile faded and she tried to look nonchalant, as she put

the compact in her purse and turned back to the window. The lights of the train went out. The morning light glowed faintly. Through the fogged window she saw oil tanks, signs—*wine, beer, liquor*—and rows of gray stucco houses. She still felt excited. There was no way to keep out the bewildering new feeling that had started last week end when she had gone to the factory to get the job. What led up to getting the job, all the things that had happened to her in the last three weeks, had piled upon her so fast that there was no wonder she felt excited.

The job began, of course, because they needed money. Her brother and sister had left the farm years ago, and they were no longer any help. Now her mother and father were getting old, so they needed money all the more. Through the eighth grade was all the schooling Shane had before she knew she had to go to work. From then until three weeks ago, she had washed and cooked and cleaned and ironed for crabby women in town whose kids were brats. But three weeks ago, on a Friday night, she came home late after doing all Mrs. Lind's washing and cooking and cleaning and ironing and taking care of her kids for \$4.00 a week, and she blew up. "What's the matter with me? Ain't I got an ounce of brains? I ain't never goin' back to that. If I work that hard again, it ain't goin' to be for no \$4.00. It'll be for nothin'. I would clean up and work like that in my own house, for my own husband and kids but never again till then. Do people think I'm dumb or somethin'?" She blew up so that her mother just stood watching her and said nothing.

During the week after that, Shane worked harder than ever before on the farm, and the farm looked better than it had at any time since Katie and Edward left. For a week she hadn't let up. She had worked like a man, swearing at the horse, putting up snow fences and planting winter wheat for forage. The

reason she had worked so hard was that she was mad. She had felt lonely, too, and working hard was the only way she could bear that. She had stood it all right until Thursday.

The last thing she did that Thursday night, before she went to bed, was to clean the kitchen sink. The house was dark except for the one electric light in the kitchen which parched her tired eyes with its white glare. The only sounds of life in the house were those of her making—scrubbing, running water, her step and the answering sound of the dishes shaking in the cupboard. Resting her hand on the damp wooden drainboard, she stopped and stared into the clean white sink. What was that great silence like? Something Irish in her made her think it was like a large, shy, beautiful woman, lonely and awkward. Most of all it was lonely. She wrung the dishcloth so that the skin of the palm of her hand twisted, and as she turned off the kitchen light and walked slowly in the dark to her room, her mind was stiff with impatience, until her throat muscles relaxed, and her lips parted, and she wept without making a sound.

The next morning, there was a card from Katie, who lived in Chicago, saying, "If Ma can spare you, why don't you come in here Frid nite? I haven't neither heard or seen you since that Tues." Shane could hardly wait for the day's work to be over, so that she could get away to Katie's. Katie, she figured, must have known what a relief it would be to get that card.

The entryway of Katie's cheap apartment building smelled of cooked cabbage and dust. The landlady did not approve of fresh air. Once Katie had complained to her that their flat was cold.

"Well, why are ye leavin' the windows open, if ye want it warm?" the woman demanded.

"We got to have fresh air," Katie said.

The landlady folded her fat arms and declared, "Fresh air is not for poor people."

Shane laughed to herself about this every time she walked up the stairs to Katie's.

When she opened the door that Friday night, she cried happily, "Hi, everybody!" The small living room, with one doorway into the bedroom, one into the kitchen, one to the public hall and two windows on the fourth side, fish net curtains hanging somber in the semi-darkness, was strangely neat and empty. Usually the radio was on, and Bert was sitting in the Morris chair reading the paper under the light of the lamp with the pink silk shade, one of Katie's prize wedding presents. Shane heard the baby whimpering. Then her sister came to the kitchen door, an attitude of listening about her thin, dark body. "Shane?" she whispered.

"Well, hi!" Shane turned on the light and the dark tan walls became pink. "Sure is dead around here."

Katie went back into the kitchen. Shane's voice followed her. "I'll finish feeding the baby. Is Bobby in here, too?" She peeked around the corner, playing a game with her nephew who sat on the kitchen table, legs swinging, both hands clutching a large piece of bread which he chewed enthusiastically, while his wide eyes wandered around the kitchen. "Hi, bub!" Shane winked at the little boy.

"Hi!" He displayed a mouthful of half-eaten bread.

Shane turned to Katie who was feeding the baby the last of a dish of *Pablum*.

"I'll finish with her," Katie said.

"Then I'll put some potatoes on for us." Shane filled a pan with water. Above the shallow, tinny sound, she asked,

"Where's Bert?"

Katie said nothing. Surprised at her sister's silence, Shane looked at her closely. The flat whiteness of Katie's cheeks showed that she was hiding something. So there was something the matter with Katie, and that was why she had invited her to come.

The baby was put to bed, and Bobby whined and begged to play with the boy who lived downstairs. Katie paid no attention to him, so he soundlessly disappeared. The two sisters put their supper on the kitchen table and sat down. At first they talked in undertones, for the baby was sleeping.

Shane began. "What's the matter around here?"

"I guess you notice Bert ain't here. He left me Tuesday." Katie stopped talking for a moment, and shook her head. "I'm stuck and I don't know where he is. Maybe on a drunk. If he's on a drunk, he better not sneak back. I'll lock him out. I'll call the police. He sneaked away and left me. My God, he ain't been home since Tuesday!" Her voice was harsh and sounded as if she had a cold. "If he was to let me know . . . Oh, I know why he done it! He gets sick and tired of everything so quick." The muscles of her throat constricted. "Well, so do I get sick of everything."

Anger for Katie's sake had fired Shane like a hot draft of air. She went to the window, pulled down the shade with a wrench, then faced her sister, her hands on her hips. "He ain't good enough for you. Don't kid yourself. Don't take him back. Ma always said he was no good." She sat down, folded her arms, and, although Katie was too sullen and hurt to listen, she said to her quickly, "You'll be O.K., Katie. You can come out on the farm, and I'll get a job. Bert was never good enough for you. He may of always had a job, but you never knew what

was going on behind your back."

"Ah, Shane, you don't know nothing about it, honey," sniffled Katie.

Shane took their dishes to the sink and pushed off the untouched food with a knife. "I never liked that guy," she said. "He's a bum." She filled a pan with hot, soapy water and plunged the dishes into it. "I never seen you so low, Katie," she said. Her voice fired again. "I understand, though. I understand plenty, and his kind don't fool me."

"I'll say this much." Trying to dissipate her anguish, Katie put her chin in one hand and toyed with a fork. "If you're Irish and you're lucky and feeling brave, you can do everything. But now, with me, it's like I'm dying; I'm that low. I can't get mad; it's sick inside of me."

While Katie sat there, sullen and tearful, Shane had gone on washing dishes, her hands automatically dipping into the hot water, grasping the plates, swirling them clean and placing them, dripping, on the drainboard. As if in a nightmare, she was heavy laden by the inarticulate grief between them, until she said what was strong in her mind.

"I wanta do something to help out." Ashamed of the futile sound of what she had said, she was glad that Katie seemed not to have heard her.

However futile it had sounded, she meant what she said, and Shane urged her sister the next day to take her to some factory, so she could get a job. Although she may have gone after the job because she wanted to throw off her part of the grief, it turned out to be what she said it would, a way to help out.

The next morning Shane had looked up Story-McNeil in the telephone book, to make sure where it was. It was the name of a factory Katie had heard Bert talk about. They dressed the

baby, wrapped it in a blanket, washed Bobby's face good, and took the bus to the factory, which was only a mile west of Katie's apartment. Because it was mid-morning, the streets were lined on each side with the parked cars of the factory workers. Shane felt like a new kid about to enroll in a school.

While Katie asked the corner policeman where to go to get a job, Shane looked with suspicion and curiosity like a shy child down the block-long building. She began to be afraid. At the street entrance of the employment office, Katie paused, Bobby tugging at her hand and the baby heavy on her other arm. "We'll wait out here," she said.

"No, you come with me." Shane was being stubborn, but she had to have Katie with her. "You got to come with me."

They sat down at one of the long tables and benches in the crowded employment office and Katie helped Shane fill out the application blank. Murmuring, they did it together, Katie pointing where to fill in answers and Shane writing them down. When the application was finished, Katie alternately watched over the baby and quietly threatened Bobby, holding fast to his arm when he wanted to pull away and climb over the bench, while Shane looked over the people who were sitting around her. Most of them seemed to have waited so long to be interviewed that they were tired of glancing at the clothes and face of each new person who came in to apply, weary of wondering what was going to happen in the interviewer's office. A fat old woman, across the table from Shane, sat slumped heavily in the straining material of her thin black coat, her swollen hands prayerfully clasped on her application blank. Her pale blue eyes were out of focus, so that she looked as if she were in a stupor. At the end of the table was a thin young man, less resigned than the old woman but more dejected, reclining at

angles, like a fallen branch, over the bench and table, his bored face sleepily holding off a yawn. They wanted jobs, too, and they had their reasons for wanting them, but she could not see in their flop-house attitudes the inward flux and reflux of the fear that was in her, fear that the job wouldn't come through and of what would happen if the job did come through.

As long as she was sitting there with Katie, looking around and waiting to be interviewed, there was still a chance to back down. She could go home to the farm, and her mother need never know how close she had come to getting a factory job. But her name was called and a sigh dilated her inside, before she got up and walked to the interviewer's office.

Hesitantly she answered questions and stood in line with self-conscious awkwardness to be examined by a doctor. She was mustered with some other applicants and sent down the factory corridors to have her picture taken and to be fingerprinted. All she had to do was what they told her, and that was easy. One thing led to another until she wound up back in the employment office. Realizing that Katie and the kids were tired, Shane tried to be calm when she told them she had a job in Story-McNeil. Katie smiled wanly, and Shane realized suddenly that there was no one with whom she could be excited about what she had done.

For six days she had had to pretend to her mother that she was sorry to leave all the farm work and go into Chicago every day. She had to hold the excitement in her, and hide it, even when she was away from the farm, on the train going into town.

Shane, sitting next to the aisle as the train thundered into the 126th Street Station, felt the dizzy roll of train wheels grow

heavy beneath her, as if with oil and dust. The shadows of the shed posts flickered across her eyes and the near noise of the train joined the greater echoing noise of the station. As she got off the train and began walking, she heard through the fracas of dynamic sound an insistent, penetrant whispering. It was in the soles of her shoes on the porous, oil-stained concrete, in the brush of her sleeves against those of the people she passed, as she walked hurriedly through the station out on the street to the bus stop. There was whispering in the motion of her hands going over the nickel and pennies for the bus fare, and it followed her down the aisle of the bus until she found a seat. When the sound of street traffic was lost in the roaring exhaust of the bus starting up, the whispers retreated to her mind, where they played insistently over the thought that she must try to keep up with the rate in the factory today.

The bus, which had swung West, ponderously stopped for more workers at every other corner until the aisle was crowded with sleepy, close-mouthed men and women who gripped the leather straps and swayed over those who sat crammed together. At the corner of Diversey and Western, the bus discharged the workers who stepped out quickly, one after another, and crossed the street to the factory.

Shane walked close to the purple-black brick wall of the giant, squat building. It was this flat wall, going straight up, yet seeming to lean toward the street that made her feel small. Because the huge, dirty windows of the first floor, crisscrossed with twisted metal screens, were out of sight above her head, the wall seemed endlessly high.

At the open doors of the entrance, she stopped, took her badge from her purse and the package of lunch from her pocket. The guard inspected them, his eyes uncomprehending, as he



looked them over briefly. "O.K., girlie." He gave her special words as if he knew she felt strange. "You're in." And she began walking the three flights of stairs to her department, her blood startled, because of the noise, the giant punch press in the basement heavily pounding like a pulse beat that lay in the stairs and windows and floors all over the factory, the scraping trudge of people walking in front of her and behind her. This was the confusion which the whispers had prepared her for.

The first time she had walked up these stairs, last Monday, she had felt so weighted by the sound of the heavy pulse that she thought she would fall down. After six days, she still felt an excitement spread through her like a vague nausea. As she walked out of the stairway to the end of the line of women who were waiting for 7:15, so that they could punch in, she appeared to be aloof. She took off her coat and hung it casually from her shoulders. She made a long search in her purse for her handkerchief and tucked it under her belt. Her eyes were half-closed and she looked self-possessed. Inwardly, she was dreading the four hours to come, because she was afraid she wouldn't be able to keep up to the rate.

Chapter 2

UNTIL the assemblers took over the Small Parts Department at 7:15 in the morning, it was a deserted and titanic piece of machinery. One at a time single bulbs, caged high in the ceiling, were turned on, touching off section after section with stale yellow light. Two or three old men wearing engineer's caps and carrying long-spouted oil cans shuffled down the faintly lit aisles saying good morning across the assembly lines and conveyer belts to the managers and superintendents who had got there early and were sitting at desks in corners or cubby-hole offices off the main corridors. The machine-din of the Small Parts Department had not begun, but a muffled heart beat, the basement punch press, thumped from below, ponderous and metal-heavy.

Earlier than usual, Michel Laporte, manager of the tachometer line, walked through the department to the northwest corner where his line, two counters divided by a conveyer belt, extended in front of a row of windows through which filtered gray morning light. At his stool, heading the line, he took off his overcoat, Paisley scarf, Harris tweed jacket and rolled up the sleeves of his cream-colored silk shirt. His small, soft mouth pursed; he whistled a popular song to himself as he combed his black, wavy hair. With a savage little stroke of a match, he

smartly lit a cigarette, glanced at the large watch on his wrist and waited. He had come early because he wanted to catch a guy named Frank Hendler, one of the eight workers on his line, a so-called pal of his, who was a lunkhead. Hendler was usually late, but, By God, he was going to be there waiting when the dipper showed up this morning.

He watched the workers as they came in slowly, at first, because there wasn't any hurry, since the signal to work didn't sound off until seven-thirty. Through the drift of his cigarette's smoke, he followed with his dark, steady eyes the advance of ardently made-up, chattering girls. There were young men with newspapers tucked at their elbows, their bare heads lowered as they shambled along; and motherly women wearing modish coats over old house dresses, their breath labored from the climb up the stairs and the long walk from the time clock. Familiar with the labyrinth of the Small Parts Department, each took his separate route to a place on the line where the same old layout reminded the assembler that there had been production yesterday and that there would be again today. Each found, as he had left it the day before, the same old hand press or drill tool, the half-filled case of parts, an oily rag, a pair of pliers left agape on the counter where the fingers had released them at exactly four the night before. Thank God, today was Saturday and tomorrow was Sunday.

"I shouldna drunk so much last night," Stella Schultz, an assembler on the tach line, was saying to her fiancé, a lively, outspoken lame man who kept books in the office but always came into the factory to hang around Stella before work. Michel, from the head of the line, and Charlie, the fiancé, watched her straighten the sheer white blouse she wore, delicately lifting her bosom, as she pushed her hand under the belt

of her skirt in back and twisted to see if the blouse was tucked in. "What's he looking at?" Stella muttered to Charlie, nodding her head at Michel. "Quit looking so sinister," she yelled to the dark-eyed little man.

"You're asking for it, baby. I feel mean today." Pitching the cigarette over the conveyer belt out the window, he began walking down the line toward them, but after running his finger up Stella's back and giving Charlie's head a brotherly push, he passed them by, saying in a slow, happy voice, "Here he comes now."

Frank Hendler went to the inspector's table behind a huge concrete post and sat down. Closing his hand over the boy's wrist, Michel surprised him, but Frank was smiling as he rolled his head back and pulled his arm away.

"I would have words with you," the smart little Manager said, his voice low and maliciously pleasant.

"O.K., O.K., O.K., Frenchie, so I left it somewheres in an empty lot. Take it easy, I got a big head this morning."

"Sometimes I wonder about that brainbox of yours." Michel's voice turned suddenly sharp. "That car cost me \$3,000. The finish in itself cost me \$250, the best money can buy. I been too nice to you, kid. You're gonna pay. Wait a minute." As he turned around, his eyes widened. "Wait a minute, honey." His words slowed down. Catching Shane by the elbow, he locked her arms across her back. "Yuh feel like being a good little girl today?" he whispered at the back of her head. "Yuh got a smile on your face today? This little mick is from the country." Still grasping her arms, he turned to Frank, "Whadye say, honey?" He put his cheek against her hair. "Like it working in a factory in Chicago?"

"Let her go put on her apron, Frenchie." Frank's mouth

twisted with the desire to laugh, and his head bobbed sullenly.

"No funny business, you." Shane pulled away without looking at either of them and walked to her place on the line.

"She's scared." Michel and Frank roared.

His eyes narrowing again, Michel cut off Frank's squalling laughter. "Meet me here at twelve. We got a few things to settle, wise guy."

Sober-faced, her mouth carefully set, Shane pretended to be preoccupied with putting away her coat, purse and lunch, and taking out her folded apron. Her head lowered a little, she looked once toward the front of the line where Michel was leaning against a table, his arm dangling over the handle of a small punch press, waiting for the bell to ring. She noticed the brown, blotted look around his eyes, which were deep set and dark. Slowly there blended in her awareness of the pressure made by his fingers on the plump flesh of her forearm, leaving white marks, and the fuzziness through her hair when he had whispered at the back of her head. Feeling a kind of disgrace, she hoped that no one had seen him catching her up.

If he had been fooling around with some other girl whom everybody knew, the workers who had seen would have laughed and the girl would have pretended to be mad or would have laughed, too. That was the way she had seen them act when the boss clipped them or edged up to them from behind. With her it was different. Nobody knew her, so it was a private matter when the boss got fresh. That was why she felt disgraced. Nobody else could appreciate the baseness or the fun of it with her. She hadn't any girl friend yet to whom she could say, "That guy better cut out the rough stuff!"

The air hoses turned on, rolling out a sound of heavy pressure through which shuddered the ring of the factory bell, a

signal to turn on the machines. The blonde woman across the aisle was so used to the clipping, banging, pounding of machines that she didn't feel a thing when the uproar began. All it meant to her was that she felt less like working than ever. Thank God, it was a half-day; only four lousy hours to go. Screwing her earrings tighter, she looked across at the new kid. Funny little kid, funny in her faded blue cotton dress, brown sweater and cotton stockings with high-heeled pumps. You could tell she was new in the big town. The stockings sagged at the knees as if they were too long and as if the garters that held them up were loose. Her black suede shoes were gray with dust, and it looked like the kid had heavy woolen underwear on under the coarse bunchy sweater and the thin little dress. Cute little figure underneath it all. If she was her kid, she'd dress her cute.

Lillian wished she had her figure back. She sighed, and the seams of her corset and tight black silk dress gave a little. Standing up, she ran her hands around her waist and looked at the little new kid again. Different from most, not dumb like a country hick or sassy like kids who grow up in the slums, but a smart little kid was how she looked. Thick, curling red hair, smooth, high-colored skin, and out on her own, not paying attention to nobody nor to nothing but the job.

Lillian's cramped feet hurt her when she walked over to Shane.

"How yuh like it around here?" she asked.

Shane had just begun broaching links. The intention to work up speed was making her hands stumble, and when she heard someone cry out to her, it gave her a scare. As she sat back from the small punch press, she was surprised that the factory noise seemed louder than ever. The fray of machinery was



fresh racket falling around her like showering sparks in the welding booth.

The blonde middle-aged woman, wearing clothes that were a cheap attempt at elegance, was leaning over her confidentially, her face suddenly so close that Shane could see white powder, heavily dry as chalk, and lipstick running off her mouth in little creases. What did the blonde want? They didn't even work on the same line.

"My name's Lillian. If you need any assistance, I'm glad to oblige . . ." Her voice penetrated the uproar.

Shane looked at her, as if from a distance, her ears still unaccustomed to the flood of sound which had receded while she concentrated on her work. The drilling, the expeditors' dragging carts, the crash of metal parts being dumped in boxes struck her so forcibly that she could say nothing. Three separate sounds rose in an outburst of din, a crash of heavy steel. She tried to smile at the blonde, but she only felt and looked agonized, so she grasped the handle of the punch press, and Lillian, taking the hint, walked wearily back across the aisle, her body rocking on her thin legs and cramped feet. Nothing to do but start work. The little kid could be mean when she wanted to be.

Without pause, Shane began broaching links again. The formula was to take up the link with one hand, put it under the stem of the press, put the needle in place with the other hand, and pull down the lever. That was just one link done. And there was a little card tacked on the rail behind the press that said you were supposed to do 150 in an hour, which was the regular rate. Probably everyone on the line could broach 150 links an hour easily, but when she tried to go faster, the same things always held her back. As she put it in place, the

tiny metal link, pressed fast between her thumb and forefinger, felt sharply hot and stuck to her fingers. The needle jerked through the hole in the link, because perspiration from her hand made it damp. The handle of the punch press seemed to stick, too. Straining, she had to pull it down with a carefully controlled force that made her tremble.

"The first couple of days," Michel had told her the first day she worked, "we don't expect you to keep up with the rest. Take your time, these first couple of days." So she had set to work slowly, heedless of the noise, because she could seal herself in her own pocket of activity. The work had been tractable then. Everything could be forgotten but the brain's whispered suggestions and the hands' motion. When she had taken her time in this way, the job seemed no different than others she had done many times before on the farm. It reminded her of the time when she was a little girl and a neighbor told her there was a pile of cowpeas out by his pigpen. "Help yourself, honey," he had said. She had always done the things her mother told her to do on the farm, and she never had a chance to try anything new. But this time, she left the farm in the middle of the afternoon with a basket and went to the neighbor's, where she sat alone on the pile of tangled green weeds until it got dark, and searched out the pea pods, which filled half the basket, to prove to her family what she could do.

When she was a child, she enjoyed doing a job well, even if it was not useful. She could remember herself, when she was so small that she could barely see into the sink, cutting up potato peelings. It wasn't as if it made the pigs any happier to have the potato peelings in the slop all cut up, but she liked to copy carefully anything the older women did.

When she grew older and did jobs which were easy and

which she knew well enough to do in her sleep, like weeding or stacking kindling, she always tried to do them as fast as she could. If the task was hard, like chopping wood, she kept trying until she got the knack. If there was a real problem, like the well's going dry, she worked ceaselessly, pumping and priming until the water poured out steadily. All this kind of work was done with her hands and her mind intently, and with the strong, stubborn desire to do it right, especially when she was doing it alone. It was true that she had to show people her achievement when it was finished. She was always pestering her father or Katie, or someone, to come and see if it was all right. And what she did was never so good when she looked it over with her father or Katie as it had seemed while she had been doing it. But, self-seriously, when she was alone and it was up to her, she felt that whatever she was doing, even if it was only chasing flies off a new calf, was the most important thing in the world. It was important to the calf and the cow and her father and mother, and she never let a fly light.

The work of childhood, of planting and harvesting, of kitchen work, came by her naturally. It seemed as impossible as a nightmare that she could not force through her hands the rhythm of this tightly economical operation.

The needle bent under the downward thrust of the press and her teeth were on edge. It was no good without a straight needle. Because she felt the workers on the line might be looking at her, she lowered her reddening face and put the link she had tried to broach back in the box, then took out a fresh one. It lay in the palm of her hand, a small, cool piece of metal, and she wished it were not so hard to handle. Joe Kajinsky was the one to talk to about the bent needle, she reasoned through the aura of her embarrassment. He was the one who had

worked longest on the tach line, so he had been made Captain. When Michel had explained the different processes of assembling a tachometer to Shane her first day at work, Joe had walked up to them smiling and saying, "It's a pleasure, whenever I can help, any time," with a generous sweep of his arm.

Realizing that she could do nothing more with the bent needle, Shane turned to look at the laughing Pole. While he worked, his head, with its thick hair tufted as if he didn't comb it when he got up in the morning, jogged from side to side. His chin pulled in, he was singing to himself and smiling from the corners of his eyes at a girl dressed in slacks who walked by with a box full of empty milk bottles which she was returning to the factory lunch counter. Shane stood up and walked over to Joe.

His face sobered with sudden concern when he saw Shane standing next to him, waiting for him to stop singing and making eyes with the kid in slacks. "Hello, there! Oh, my," he murmured, as Shane put the bent needle in his hand.

"Them things are sure mean," she shouted.

He hummed, ya, ya, and looked beyond Shane, his crooked finger lifted, his head back, the polite, sober expression of concern still on his face, as if he were a headwaiter. "Frenchie! Come a minute!" he roared to Michel, who shambled over to them. "This little girl here," the Pole explained to Michel, nodding his shaggy head and tapping the bent needle which he held in his hand, "need anodder large box needles." He carefully handed the needle back to Shane and took up his work again.

So she had bent some more needles. A mean smile began on Michel's face.

"Get after that kid calls himself an exshpediter," Joe said

firmly to Michel, like a headwaiter who will give the waiter hell behind the scenes. "One box needles. Right away." Joe smiled assurance at Shane who rolled the hot, bent needle back and forth between her perspiring thumb and forefinger, looking down at her dusty suede shoes, listening to the Captain of the line tell the boss what she needed.

Joe was a worker like her, sitting at a machine all day. Although he was always giving the eye to the girls who waggled by, Shane knew you could trust the guy because he worked hard. Being Captain of the line didn't make him any different from the rest of the workers, except he could say what he felt like to Frenchie, even though Frenchie was a boss and didn't have to sit himself down and give off his strength to a little machine. Wondering whom she should be afraid of, Frenchie or Joe, she decided on Frenchie, because she felt he was laying for her.

"Sure, we don't expect too much from this little mick here." His voice, when he stood close to her and talked in this mean way, was sear and husky from smoking many cigarettes. Waiting for him to break out with bawling abuse, or to yell to an expediter to give her the needles, or to grab her arm suddenly and tightly, she turned her head aside and watched Joe work, watched his hands moving with quick, grave force, while inside the closed palm of her hand the bent needle felt maddeningly light and small.

"The shteel. Dond know how to temper the shteel." Joe smiled sadly, his hands moving so quickly over the machine that he looked as if he could draw it into the air by the power of his light touch. "That's the trobble wit the needles." Joe was being nice, making conversation, she figured, while Frenchie decided what kind of hell to give her.

With a sudden violent yawn, Michel swayed back against a counter of the tach line and settled there, his elbows propping himself, his chin heavy on his neck. For one hot, noisy moment, Shane thought he was going to fire her.

"You don't need any more needles today, baby. Let's think of something else for a change."

"You talk things over. I smoke." Joe's hands turned off, slowed down, slumped at rest on his knees. Disappointment like a reverse of her blood's course went through Shane as she watched the Pole stand up and stretch, then walk through the aisle of clattering sound to the men's room for a cigarette. He wasn't the worker she had thought he was. Nothing in the factory ever took the turn she expected.

"One more chance, I'll give you one more chance," Michel said lazily, like a powerful benefactor. Shane's face went hot. If he had been giving her chances, she hadn't realized it. Had she been dumb or something, not seeing or hearing him give her chances to show what she could do, until now when he was giving her one last try? There was some code, she was afraid, some set of signals with the hands or the eyes, a way of talking which all the workers in the factory and the bosses knew, which everybody in the big city knew, and which she had never had a chance to learn on the farm. No one had ever told it to her. She felt she was losing out. People like her who didn't know the language spoken between Joe and Michel didn't belong here until they learned how to talk.

"Whadye want to do?" He looked at her lazily, the darkness around his eyes spreading the color of sensuality into the skin of his face. The game of fighting people off and being afraid of them was petering out because Frenchie was tired of playing it. She had to think fast to keep it going.

"You're the boss," she said, her voice low, so that he had to jut his head toward her to hear, "but if I was you, I s'pose I would give me somethin' new to do. I don't get along so good with broaching them links." She was hating the little needle that lay in the creased palm of her hand. "But you're the boss."

"You're damn' right I'm the boss."

An expression came to Shane's face, making her look as if she had tasted something a little sour. Michel liked it. She looked mad, helplessly mad.

"You don't really think I'm the boss, you little mick," he chuckled, "but you'll learn. O.K., baby," he stood up, "if you're so smart, we'll find something new. You already broached enough links to last a month. If you're so smart, we'll give you something harder to do. Hey, Rose!" he shouted to a girl who sat at the end of the line. He jerked his head toward Shane, as Rose walked up to him. "Teach this kid how to put ball bearings in cylinders."

Slowly the girl wiped her hands on a clean rag. "You been pestering this little kid?" She looked at Michel, the brown eyes in her gaunt face bright and peaceful, as if they saw right through him. She was tall and thin, with the bones of her face and narrow body sharp and hard as rock. Looking down at Shane, she winked broadly. "Don't mind him," she said. "He wouldn't hurt a sick flea."

"O.K., Rosie, you don't interest me." Michel yawned violently again. "Take this mick and show her the ropes. Teach her how with the ball bearings." He laughed, and walked away.

"Follow me," Rose said to Shane. "What's your name?" She peered down at the badge on Shane's collar. "Kearney. Guess that makes you Irish."

Shane walked behind the tall, thin girl to the end of the line.

"Ain't it nice it's Saturday?" Rose called over her shoulder.

"Yeah," Shane yelled. Although her throat was as tight as if a cold ribbon were tied around it, she forced her voice to sound bright. You were supposed to be glad when Saturday came. That was one of the things she was learning. She was supposed to be going out tonight to have a wild, good time, like everybody else.

She should never let on that after work she would be going over to Katie's, where the atmosphere was sour and dreary because the man of the family was gone, and although Bert hadn't been much of a man, to her way of thinking, he had seemed to belong with Katie in that apartment. Later, tonight, she would take the train home and then walk slowly down the dark road, the barn and the apple trees and the broken down car shed coming closer and closer until she was there on the doorstep, calling to her mother, asking what her father had been up to.

"Yeah, it's swell working only half a day on Saturday," Shane said, while Rose sat down at her table to organize the tools and explain to the new kid how to set ball bearings in cylinders, "but you don't make as much that way."

"Yer right. But this way you don't kill yerself. You just get wore out."

About to explain the new work to her, Rose looked up at the little mick and saw a desperate, crazy look in her eyes that meant she was fighting to keep from crying.

She must not give herself away to Rose. The desire to cry was twisted back in its place and, eyes dry, she smiled shortly, then flared up in anger. "That guy! That Michel! He fools with me so I don't know what's goin' on."

"Listen, honey," Rose laid one arm on the table and the other was crooked at her waist, "don't talk to me about men." She was trying to get Shane to laugh. "With a face like mine I get nothin' but insults. But me? I laugh. If I don't laugh," she pointed a bony finger at Shane, "I'd have to shoot myself."

Shane did laugh. Rose was the first person she felt like talking to. Maybe that was because Rose had seen her swallowing back some tears, and she was being nice about it.

"Gum?" She offered a piece to Shane, who took it and unwrapped it carefully. "Where's your home at?" she asked like a kindly policeman helping a child who is lost.

Shane folded the stick of gum into her mouth. "Oh, I live fifty-five miles out," she said, "on a farm. Gotta get up at 4:15 every morning." Rose was the first person she had told that to, and it was a comfort to be able to say it. Shane smiled, as Rose's head went back and her eyes widened, looking at her with amazement. "My God, how do you do it?"

Shane was laughing. This was what she had needed, someone to confide in, a girl friend. "I'm Irish, kid," she said, "and I may move into Chicago yet."

Rose was impressed.

"Maybe you oughta show me what you do with them ball bearings," Shane had to remind Rose, and she leaned down to watch, while the older girl told her how to smear vaseline on the rim of the cylinder, pick up thirteen ball bearings in a ring around the rim.

"See?" Rose said. "When you fit them in, they move around like beads. Regular pearls, ain't they? Only different." Rose talked like a girl demonstrating a product in a ten cent store, words let out of her mouth while she was thinking of something else. Then her tone of voice changed. "Say," she said,

"do you eat with any particular girls? Reason I asked is, if you ain't got nobody else to eat with, eat with me, and I'll innerduce you to my friends." Rose stood up and untied her apron.

Shane sat down and dipped her fingers in the vaseline.

"What you doin'?" Rose asked.

"Givin' it a try."

Rose opened her purse and took out a powder puff which she flapped on her narrow, prominent nose. "Can't you tell time?" Looking at the clock, Shane saw that the four hours were nearly up. "It's all over," Rose said.

The bell rang, the machine-sound bogged down, then collapsed, and the relieving lull was oppressive to Shane as she watched Rose put on her hat. She began to feel that she was alone again.

"Come on. Let's go out together," Rose said. "I'll wait for you."

"Swell," Shane said, and as she went back to her stool, she felt as if she were walking on solid ground after having driven for hours in an old car. There was a ticking in the air, the sound of hot motors cooling off. Thinking that she might eat her lunch in the factory, the way she did every other day, she had taken sandwiches. But she could see that the idea was to get out as soon as possible, so she put the small package in her purse.

As she wearily pulled on her coat, the other assemblers pushed by her to swarm around the sinks, wash their hands and rush to punch the time clock. Women walked past her, visibly perking up in anticipation of a big time tonight. They stopped to make up their faces, closed their purses, waited for friends and hurried down the corridor. At the time clock, the stairway landings, the exit to the street, there were

the usual foot-tapping wives looking for their husbands, so that they might go home together. Some of the men, inching through the crowd, shifted from side to side looking for an opening through which they might jut their elbows and pitch their knees. Everyone in the moving crush pressed forward, except the younger girls who lingered in the rear of the crowd on the sidewalk and talked loudly with each other, while they sought the eyes of an occasional boy who lounged against the wall, gazing with lazy interest through the cigarette smoke he released from his pale mouth.

"Well, so long, kid," Rose said, when they stepped out on the sidewalk. "You can go meet your boy friend now. Don't forget about eatin' with me Monday, if you wanta."

"I sure wanta," Shane said, "and I ain't got no boy friend!" she yelled, as the older girl walked away. Talkative and natural was the way she had felt with Rose, and it felt good for a change. If only she did live in Chicago, maybe she would have a nice boy friend and they would be going out tonight.

Chapter 3

A FEW of the men stayed behind in the desolate factory Saturday afternoon to work for time and a half. At the inspector's table of the tachometer line, three men were eating lunch. Two of them wore ties and unbuttoned vests, their pockets weighted by silver pencils and micrometers. They read the racing forms and yawned while the third, Barry Antamaraine, finished his lunch slowly and in silence. Unlike the others, he wore the clothes of a machinist, a white undershirt, ragged sweater, overalls and thick-soled, snub-toed boots. He was abnormally short but his arms and shoulders were those of a big man.

"Antamaraine!"

Barry looked up. Standing at his elbow was a tall, stoop-shouldered boy. "Pete!" Barry shouted pleasantly and stood up to shake the boy's limp, long-boned hand. "Back on the tach line. What are you doing around here?"

"I just come in to look around for a minute. Yeh, I left California and come back on my old job." Pete sat down and smiled, his pale mouth curving in such a way that he looked certain to say nothing more.

Barry jumped up backwards to sit on the table and ran his stumpy fingers through his black hair. The Armenian looked

down for a moment at his snub-toed boots, in silence, before he spoke, as if he were arranging the words. But then he spoke quickly, his head tilted to one side, looking very closely at his friend. "So you came home to the tach line. Well, you belong here. You can't go into a strange factory and be happy." He looked down, his head still tilted, and he fitted the knuckles of his fists together, like the cogs of two wheels. "You get used to the same stool and certain windows and one way of walking home from work, and you don't like to change." He rumbled his dark hair again. "That's the way it is." He smiled, liking what he had just said.

"Nah," Pete said, "it don't matter where I work. I couldn't get no place to live in California. That's why I come back."

Barry tilted his head to the other side. "We don't change much, any of us." His face was distorted like that of a dwarf as he pointed at Pete. "You're a little thinner and paler, that's all. California couldn't make you big and tan the way they say it does."

"Aw, I don't know." Pete raised his eyebrows and opened his mouth, as if he were ready to laugh and knew he was the butt of some joke, but didn't see what was funny. "You always was a little off in the head," he said.

"Never mind," said Barry. "Let us drink beer later at Angie's. I will work one hour. I will be through then because there is not enough work to do."

Pete sat down and lit a cigarette. "I'll wait."

"You rest." Barry was gently sardonic.

Later they stepped out on the street which was gray-cast with the light of early afternoon. The children who ran through the alleys and played on the empty lots did not feel that it was time to quit, but the workers from the factory were

through for the day. The crowd from the assembly lines had spread through the streets and been carried away in buses, but those who worked in the basement with the punch press and with heavier machines were still coming out of the factory. Most of these men walked in pairs, tired and silent. Their arms hung loosely and they stared at the sidewalk, as they loped along, their heavy, dirty overcoats blown back by the November wind.

Barry and Pete, his lank-boned friend, walked the block to Angie's in silence, too, until they came to an intersection opposite the factory and had to wait, while mud-spattered cars rushed by. At the curb, a thin child in ragged corduroy was trying to move his wagon, which was piled high with empty bushel baskets, from the sidewalk down to the street. The cars stopped coming, and the boy, trying to hurry across the street, fumbled with his wagon in an effort to keep the load from toppling over, as he guided it down the curb. A couple of workers brushed past him, tired and unnoticing. Barry Antamaraine took all this in.

"It's gracious of them not to kick it over," he said to Pete. He wanted to pick up the wagon, bushel baskets and all, and carry it to the sidewalk across the street. The sound of his voice caught the attention of the boy who knew that someone nearby was willing to stop and help. He turned up his dirty face, then looked back to his wagon, annoyed by the interruption. He didn't want any help. If Barry had been his size, the independent little boy would have threatened to hit him.

Turning to Pete, Barry said, "You see, they don't want any help, these poor little people." He laughed.

"The kid'll get a quarter for that stuff now," soft-spoken Pete said, "an' I used to get a dime if I was lucky. It's a lousy

thing." His voice faded at the end of everything he said.

Barry laughed. His step was orderly and decisive, with the rhythm of his head going from side to side. As he walked along, he didn't look away from the sidewalk in front of him, until he stopped at a newsstand to buy a paper which he carefully folded and put in his pocket.

When Pete and Barry pushed through the door of Angie's tavern, they heard a shout of familiar-sounding laughter, shrill above the brawling noise that filled the place. At a table where several factory workers had gathered sat Lillian, her blond head tipped back, her mouth wide, crowing loudly at a beery joke. She had her arm around Joe Kajinsky's slouching back. At her other side was a thin, little, older man who, although he was sitting at the same table with them, seemed to be drinking alone, for no one paid any attention to him. Michel sat nearby in a booth with a giggling girl who was wearing slacks.

As soon as work was over, Angie's, which was the tavern nearest to the factory, always surged with factory people who couldn't wait to tie one on, have a little fun, forget their troubles.

"There's little Short Beer," Lillian yelled, when she saw Barry. "Come ov'r 'ere, you," she commanded. "An' Pete, my old flame, come home to his mama. I'm yer mama, ain't I, Pete?" Pete and Barry pulled chairs up to the table and sat down, Barry next to the thin little man nobody paid any attention to.

Joe leaned back and held out his hands to Barry and Pete. "You have nothing to drink, little friends. Come here." He waved to the waiter. "Here we are. We drink beer?" Joe tipped his head quizzically, as if to say, "Whatever you drink with me, it will make me very happy." When Joe got a little

drunk, he was more than ever gracious in the way of the old world. The waiter brought them more beer. Joe picked up the full glass and studied it lovingly. "If I do not drink beer, I get sick and die."

"Me, too. I'm drunk awready," Lillian announced.

"How are you, Leo?" Barry asked quietly. Leo looked away from the empty, yellowed glass which had been fascinating him. "What are you thinking about, Leo?" Barry encouraged the sad-faced little man who needed a shave and was sickly pale but wore a topcoat of a very good quality of tweed. Leo was a queer one, and no one but Barry was ever nice to him, because once you got him started, he never stopped talking.

"They don't understand why they aren't happy." Leo's voice was low, as if he were afraid somebody might hear him. "I don't expect them to know the fundamentals of Marxianism. Do you know the fundamentals of Marxianism?"

"Yes, I know them, but you're too old to worry about things like that. You ought to know better." Barry's voice was kind.

Lillian hung a fat arm around Pete and, leaning against him, she confided, "That old guy," she waved her hand at Leo, "buys me all the drinks I want every night, but he makes me sick. He buys me any little thing I want. He wants me to quit my job and take care of him. He treats me swell, but he makes me sick. Men always treated me like hell. He says I asked for it. He calls me his little girl. He's nuts, yuh know." Lillian started to smile, but the smile turned into a hiccup, and she made a face, winking very deliberately at Pete who paid no attention, because he was shy and didn't care much about women, especially silly, drunken women. So Lillian turned back to Joe Kajinsky who patted her arm. "Come on, Joe,

whadye say?" She kissed his cheek.

"So you want to start something?" Barry was saying to Leo, who had collared him. "Why do you want me to help you start it? I am happy at my work."

"It will all depend on how we approach it," Leo said, the muscles in his bluish cheeks working with the effort to steady his mind. "Suppose I ask some poor worker, like Lillian here," his eyes were sad as he looked tenderly at the fat blonde, "'What are the contradictions within capitalism?' She would say she didn't get me."

"Neither would I get you," said Barry.

Leo didn't hear him. "But suppose I put it this way." He twisted his thin white wrist and pointed toward the ceiling. "'What in this world do you want to complain about?' Then she knows what I'm talking about. She says, 'I have seen poverty, unemployment, people on relief. Now I work hard under poor conditions, and the money just doesn't go far enough. Everything is expensive. While I work, my boss gets drunk. I am too young to work so hard,' she would say."

"Lillian would say that?" Barry asked gently.

Leo would cry if he talked any more, so Barry interrupted him. "If you got a ten-cent raise," Barry called to Lillian who was draining a glass with that intense sobriety that comes over a drunk when swallowing the liquor, "what would you do with the money?" "Honey, I would buy a white fur coat," she said, and everybody roared. Joe pinched her thick waist and stood up to leave. Her eyes half-lowered with pretended anger, Lillian growled at him, "Leavin' me, huh? Rattin' out on me. Where yuh goin'?" She pulled at Joe's coat sleeve.

"Poor Lillian," Joe said, lightly pulling one of her stiff, white-blond curls, "I go home to my mama." His eyes twinkled, as

he turned to leave.

"Say, Joe," Michel called from the dingy booth where he was drinking beer with the girl who wore slaeks. "Whadye make of the new woman on the line?" Michel's eyes were shining and bloodshot, and his mouth was wet.

Joe looked serious and thoughtful, the way the Captain of the tachometer line should look. "She good, nice kid," he said. "She work hard. You scare her plenty, but she show you." Glancing at the little doll, Joe laughed. "You watch out this guy. He tough on women," he said, and walked away.

The girl, who could never seem to sit still, but squirmed and wriggled and hugged against Michel, pinched the Frenchman's arm and giggled.

"You don't believe him, hah?" Michel took her shoulder with one hand and held down her knee with his other, as if to keep her from running away. His hands were heavy and kept her perfectly still for a minute. Then he let go, with scorn, as if he knew the girl was going to be easy. Spinning his empty glass to the opposite edge of the table, he said, "Control yourself for a minute, baby, and I won't be long." He stood up and walked over to Lillian's table.

"Here comes a Bantam rooster," Lillian greeted him.

Michel walked around to Pete, and took a handful of shirt at the small of Pete's back, pulling it, so that the boy had to stand up. "Old Hungry Pete," Michel yelled. "What a sight you are!"

Pete was usually speechless and slow-moving with people he had not known all his life. He had grown up with Barry in the west side neighborhood, between the Irish and the Italian sections, so he knew how to talk with Barry, but Michel he did not understand. Not knowing whether Michel was really mad,



he made no reply to the dapper little man.

"So you come back home for some Hungarian goulash, eh, Hungry?" Michel's face became solemn, as he pretended to be very concerned about Pete. "So you decided to come back," he teased in a hushed voice. "Do you think you'll like it better here now than you used to? I hope so." Claspings Pete's hand very tightly, his voice mocked him. "There aren't any new improvements over there," he flapped his arm behind him in the direction of the factory. "Same conveyer belts, same air hoses and time clocks. But there's one improvement." He lowered his voice confidentially. "There's a cute new kid on the line, named Shane. Take a look, if you want to trouble yourself to come to work Monday. See what we got to offer, while you were being a bum in California." He spat the word *bum*.

Peculiarly silent, Pete looked down at Michel with his eyelids almost shut and his quiet mouth relaxed, but a muscle in the side of his face, at the socket of his jaw, moved in his cheek as if he were biting again and again, although his teeth were clamped. The little boss squeezed Pete's hand tighter and tighter as he teased him, but he didn't struggle to pull it out of Michel's grip.

"Yeah, pretty soon, I'll probably let her run the line." With a flip, Michel released Pete's hand, and Pete sat down heavily.

When Pete had worked on Michel's line before he got a hankering to try California, he used to listen to Frenchie brag that he had once been suspected of murder and that he used to be mixed up in dirty politics. He had seen Frenchie playing the joker, stuffing wet paper towels inside the shirts of the men who leaned over the sinks in the factory, scrubbing their hands after work, and he was used to guys like Michel trying

to start something in a crowded joint. When Michel, who called himself strictly American, turned his blathering on him, the boy's face, usually immobile and sullen, showed only a faint, secretive smile, like that of a disinterested foreigner who does not quite understand. Pete's shy apathy impressed Michel as being a kind of demureness which he didn't like in the men he worked with.

"You're stupid," Frenchie said to Pete who was tipping his glass gently from side to side, apparently not listening. If Michel had lit a match and held it suddenly in front of the boy's face, Pete's eyes, like a blind man's, would not have widened at the nearness of the flame. He would have stared and said, "Cut it out," in a shyly disgusted way.

Michel walked around to Lillian and hung his arms over her shoulders and around her neck. Eagerly she patted his hands and laughed happily. "Any-a you guys looking for trouble, my old woman here'll take care of you," Michel threatened. Looking up toward the entrance of the tavern, his half-closed eyes, which, like a bad actor's, never altered when he was harassing the suckers on his line, showed a fine new interest. Frank Hendler was coming in. Seeing Frenchie, he held up his hand and made a circle with his thumb and forefinger, a spruce little sign of recognition. Paying no attention to the crowd, he lit a cigarette, and walked over edgewise between the groups of laughing, hungry-eyed girls.

"Where'd you leave the skirt at?" He looked around the table but addressed himself to Michel, as if Michel was the only one who understood his kind of talk.

"Her? She's a nymph." Michel played up to Frank's swagger. "I'm letting her cool off." He dipped his head toward the table where the girl sat, idly running her fingers through her

long, coiling hair. Blowing a thick stream of smoke over Lillian's table, Frank watched the doll for a minute, and gave a short, convulsive laugh. He was beginning to feel good. Maybe Frenchie wasn't going to make it tough on him for putting a hole in the fender of his \$3,000 car after all. It was Saturday. He had plenty of money. He looked down at Barry and Leo and Pete. "Whad yuh say?" He shouted, as if to wake them up. These little fairies were sitting with sad looks on their faces like thick-headed foreigners, while the noise of Angie's customers went up with the smoke, and the smell of beer filled the place.

"I will offer them Workers' Education," Leo was insisting in his soft, monotonous voice. Smiling, Barry knew that Leo was a joke, but his eyes showed that he was listening seriously. Shaking his head, he interrupted the quiet little drunk. "Nothing beyond their vision of life can be brought within their range. None of us knows exactly what we need." He could make himself sound just like Leo.

Pete had nothing to do with them. His hands lay idle and protective on either side of his half-finished glass of beer. His back was curved, so that his sleepy head could not be seen from behind.

"What's he doin' here?" Frank asked Michel, who was whispering something to Lillian, his face against her fat, round neck.

"Him?" Lillian shrieked. "He come back to Chicago to his Lillian, di'n you, kid?"

"How's yer wife?" Frank called down to Pete, who made no move to show that he had heard anyone talking to him.

"You're too smart to get tied up with a woman, aren't you, son?" Michel stood up.

His head back, Pete tipped the drink to his mouth, his face gray behind the strong yellow of the beer in the glass.

"I been tellin' him about the redhead on the line," Michel said to Frank, a wise expression on his face, as if there was a joke on Pete which only Frank would get.

"Her? She's too slow," Hendler played along with Frenchie.

"Nah, she'd be great. She'd take him for a long ride, give him some thrills. Did you ever look at that little mick?"

"Sure, he's right, Hungry." Hendler hit Pete on the back the way Michel would have done it, quickly, dismissing Pete as a stupid lunkhead.

Michel's interest in the group weakened and he urgently wanted something to give him a kick. "I need a drink."

"Sure." Hendler looked through the warm smoke at the doll with long hair who sat waiting for Michel, and he began moving with inexperienced zeal toward her table. "The bar, you." Michel twitted him.

They drank hard liquor out of shot glasses. After the first, Michel warned Hendler that he might have to get tough about the car. After three shot glasses, with beer for a chaser, Frank had handed over the money to repair the torn fender, paper money pulled from a roll which he held close to his trouser pocket, so that Michel could not see, as he pulled off the bills with slow care, his face temporarily sober.

"This deal isn't finished yet," Frenchie folded the money and put it away quickly, as if there were more coming.

They drank two more shot glasses and laughed until they coughed. Frenchie yelled to the girl, who walked up to him, her hips wide in the slacks, and leaned under his arm while he advised Hendler that he had a great idea for "making" the new kid on the line. "It'll be good for you," the boss kept

saying, like a trainer encouraging a young fighter. "You'll never drive my car to hell again until you get that kid to take a ride with you, and I'm coming along. We'll do the town an' take her by surprise, won't we, Florence?" he looked down at the girl who was too dumb to talk, as Frenchie had explained to Frank.

"This redhead couldn't interest me 'cept for purely personal reasons," Frank kept mumbling confidentially.

Frenchie leaned back and blew out his cheeks with drunken exasperation. "Your wife has her fun, too," he yelled.

Frank was fried. With both his hands he took Michel's collar and, staring into his neck, gently shook him, saying again and again, "How d' you know she does; I don't trust you; how d' you know she does?"

"Look out for this little girl here." Michel moved a glass away from Hendler's elbow, smiling down at the girl.

It was growing darker outside, turning into Saturday night, and everyone was getting tight except Barry. He looked first at Pete who quietly tapped the table with an empty glass in time to the music from the juke box. Then he looked at Leo who was stretching his thin arm, sleeved in the good tweed material of his topcoat, over the table to Lillian. Her large plump hand comforted his small, bony fingers, and Leo was lost in adoration of her.

Taking a knitted stocking cap from his pocket, and pulling it down over his ears, Barry got ready to leave. It would be cold out and the air would be good. He left some money on the table and, without starting a noisy protest by saying good-bye, he stood up and went to the door. No one noticed him moving through the crowd.

As he walked alone on the dark street, pressing against the

November wind, he thought about what Leo had said, and he felt sad. There were conflicting stories about Leo. Lillian said he had been a college professor gone bats, too smart for himself. Judging by his clothes and all his money, some people thought he was either Mr. Story or Mr. McNeil and that he had become too rich and gone crazy. Barry had heard Leo talk about Chicago University. Once Leo had invited the Armenian to have dinner with him at International House, and when Barry refused, Leo had said, "Look at you. You cry to me for knowledge, but you will not accept my offers to give you a good dinner."

Some of Leo's phrases reminded Barry of words he had heard in Bughouse Square during the Depression: "An insurgent beginning of an inevitable drive for freedom . . . economic rights . . . driven to performing miraculous reforms to free ourselves." These words depressed him now and made him feel sorry for Leo. To clear his mind of them, he decided to go to the Public Library, where he took out the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. He found comfort in the reading room, as he sat whispering the words on the first pages of the first volume until closing time.

When he checked his books out, he had a little conversation with the Librarian who was half-pretty, with soft hair and horn-rimmed glasses, of indeterminate age, and who spoke with a quiet, pen-moving voice.

"I can always count on your visits," she said, as she stamped his book.

"The Hall of Knowledge is always open, and I shall always enter," Barry replied carefully.

"That's fine," she said. "Do you enjoy Lawrence?"

"Yes." Always too uncomfortably awed to speak to her with

ease, he looked down at his feet until he thought of what to say. "It is a great book," he decided. "Lawrence is great."

She seemed to invite more comment.

"I think . . . I think his ideas are very philosophical. He comes right to the point."

The Librarian was puzzled. The little Armenian obviously didn't understand what he read.

"Well," Barry picked up the books, "I guess I will go now." He turned twice with a half-bow. "Good night, good-bye," he said to the quiet figure under the green hanging lamp, who smiled with the restraint of a well-trained librarian.

He went home to his room in the boarding house, and read until after midnight, forgetting to eat.

Chapter 4

SATURDAY after work just about every girl who lived in Chicago got dressed up and met her boy friend, if she was lucky enough to have one. They jammed the buses and fought through the crowds to buy stockings, flowers for their hair and little things in the ten cent store. Later, maybe, they got picked up on the corner of Madison and State or went to a roller-skating rink or to a show with a girl friend. Some got drunk, if they were that kind. Everyone played hard and had a swell time; everyone who was life-weary at the factory machines and life-thirsty as soon as work was over.

Because she was not moving with this flow of excitement, Shane could no longer pretend to be glad it was Saturday. The westbound bus she took was not so crowded as the one going east toward the Loop. She was on her way to see Katie who had sent her another card Wednesday, which said, "Come on over Sat. Don't go out to the farm first. I been thinking. Let's talk it over."

As she walked up the dark stairs of Katie's flat, the smell of cooked cabbage and dust and the oily wood of the banister drew her back to Katie's sorrow over Bert, and Shane wished faintly that she was a little girl again, who could feel misfortune as strong or stronger than anyone, but was not expected, or

was not able, to do anything about it. When she walked into the apartment, Katie came out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron, and smiled. "Your face is dirty," she said.

"Sure it's dirty. Farms ain't dirty compared to that factory."

"Well, sit down." There was a sigh of relief in Katie's voice for her sister who had this job, so new and strange, but who was away from it all now.

Feeling Katie's sympathy, Shane was wearily pleased, and a little sorry for herself, and she sat down in the Morris chair and took off the high-heeled shoes.

"I wonder if you should of got this job," Katie said. She sat down opposite Shane. Her pale-lidded, strong gray eyes showed that consciously it was her sister she was thinking of now, but that unconsciously, behind the sympathy in her eyes, she was filled with defeatism over herself.

The soft white flesh of Katie's arms, fattened a little in the last few years, the apron, dirty with work, tied tight under her breasts, and her face, young and pretty still, but her hair disorderly, made Shane see her as the mother of small children. Unlike her mother, Katie was not resigned, the flesh had not settled, nor was she work-worn with a resolved pattern of life. She was in between being young and firm and springy, like green grass in early summer, and old, unstrung, no longer taut. Katie's mouth was gray under the pink of yesterday's lipstick. She spoke her words more slowly and with less annoyance than when she was young.

A little girl again, Shane was thinking over Katie's past. Love in those days, as far as she could remember, had been something crazy. From her attic bedroom window it had seemed wild and sad when Katie came home late at night with Bert or some other boy. A Model T Ford would bounce into the side

road that led to the Kearneys' farm and draw up to the kitchen door with a flourish of cinders and dust. Through the night their voices, Katie's shrill, Bert's maliciously low, kept Shane awake, for, although she seldom caught their words, the sounds of them quarreling or making love were always there under her window, until Katie came stumbling up the steep attic stairs, sometimes weeping, sometimes a little drunk. Love in those days in a small town, or just outside of town on a small farm, meant, as usual, never enough money. It was the marcelled hair of the girls blowing in the wind on the cold corners of the small town, it was automobile smash-ups, it was a boy pushing a girl against the barn door and getting fresh, it was Bert chasing after her sister, as Katie claimed, with nothing to offer but the chance to get off the farm and move to Chicago. He had held that over her, teasing her, because he knew how she hated the farm, and he had started an excitement in Katie that was at once impatient, cruel, laughing. It was nerve living off dissatisfaction. It made her go crazy until late one night, when she packed her clothes in the cardboard valise Bert had given her, and said to Shane, "I'm never gonna come back to this farm routine." With childish wisdom, Shane had taunted quietly, "Don't never say 'never.'"

Katie had thought that moving to Chicago would make her happy, but something unhappy came over her, instead. Before she was married, Bert and she used to drive up to the house long after midnight, and they'd sit and argue, struggling and laughing, and there would be long silences which would sicken Shane with interest, because she had an idea of what was going on. But the last time they had driven out to the farm from Chicago, it was in the cold gray light of a Sunday afternoon. Through the windows of the car could be caught a glimpse of

a pink baby bonnet, a little boy standing behind the driver, and a pale young woman clutching at the door handle to steady her rocking body. One by one, silent and tired from the exhausting trip in the old car, they climbed out, Katie carrying the new baby. Bert threw a kiss to Shane, embarrassing her and making her mad, for she didn't like the glint in his eyes. Then he sprawled in the parlor rocker, reading the Sunday paper, while Katie sat sullenly in the kitchen.

Dullness had come over Katie. That's what had happened to Katie when she went to Chicago. Shane wanted to say, "What's the matter with you?" but she knew inside what was the matter. Katie and Bert had never really loved each other. Being away from the farm routine was all Katie had wanted, and when she got that, she discovered Bert and she didn't go for each other any more.

The best possible thing that came from it, Shane reasoned, was the two kids. Shane loved kids. Girls didn't grow up and become women until they had kids, she believed. Marrying Bert and living in Chicago had changed Katie for the worse, but the two kids had changed her for the better. There was the in-between-ness that Shane saw in Katie: Katie growing motherly, but alone with her children, sad-looking because she couldn't hold her man.

"What you goin' to do?" Shane asked it like a child. Her fingers trembling, she put her hands to her hair and fondled it.

"Why, you're shakin' like a little aspen leaf!" Katie ignored Shane's question. She was a stricken-looking woman, if you knew what was going on inside her, but her voice was easy and soft, a calm young mother's voice.

"Oh, that's account of my workin' on them little machines." Every night, since she had started work, her hands shook from

having been under a new strain all day. The uncontrollable trembling disgusted her.

"I used to do that when I was a kid, too. You'll get over it. How you gettin' along on that job?"

"I'll be O.K. I met a nice girl, named Rose, today. She put me wise."

"She wisened you up, hah?"

"Yeah." She wanted to tell Katie about Michel, and the blonde who scared her, the great noise and eating lunch so fast. She could tell her about Joe Kajinsky and how she worried whether she was dumb or something and whether he thought she was not as good a worker as the others. For a moment recollections of the factory wound up in her and around her, and she wanted to tell Katie everything. Katie would listen, all right, and she'd understand, but there would be the tired look around her eyes. "What you goin' to do now, Katie?" she asked again.

"That's why I told you to come over today." The news came through her eyes first, and then she said it. "I'm movin' back to the farm—tomorrow."

"Sure," Shane sat up and clasped her hands hard together. "Ma don't know, but that don't matter none." She could think of nothing else to say.

Katie would be coming home with her two kids, she thought to herself slowly, and it would be like old times. Deliberately, she turned over in her mind memories of the old days on the farm, trying to see if they would fit again. Their farm hadn't been much more prosperous then, but from a kid's point of view—her's when she was little, and Bobby's now—it was big-barned and seemed larger than it actually was. The distance between the kitchen door and the hen house was a long

summer morning's walk. When you got there, the chickens swarmed, white and flapping, around your legs, while you bawled them out and threw grain down on them. You walked with dirty bare feet in summer and high-stepped it home through the snow from the schoolhouse in winter. You played in lonely quietness with acorn shells for cups and saucers.

She would put up the old-tire swing from the apple tree for Bobby. Everything might be the way it had been when she was little.

"It don't seem possible," Shane said, and, having admitted that, she was suddenly brought face to face, as if in a mirror, with the fact that now, while she threw herself at her new job, Katie could take her place at home. She had a job in a factory now, she was thinking, as if a reflection of herself were talking to her. She had to punch the time clock every morning and she couldn't get away until night. There had been just one week of it, and it was overpowering and new. Because her job was these things, she could only move farther forward into it, into the insides of the machines where there was plenty of noise, no more lonely quietness. Now she could really roll up her sleeves and walk right into the heart of Chicago, onto the third floor of Story-McNeil.

Katie went into the kitchen to fix the baby's formula.

Following her sister, Shane called out, as if they were in the factory, "Let's go right now. There ain't no reason why not." As she trailed Katie from the icebox to the sink, she tried to look into her face, for she was feeling stormy now, and she wanted Katie's approval of her idea. "It's the only thing, Katie. You got to get away from here. It ain't good for the kids bein' around here either. Why don't you clear out this afternoon?" She stood next to Katie at the stove, waiting for her to make

up her mind.

"You're like Pa, followin' me around and ravin'."

"He got drunk last night."

"Sure he did. Don't he always?" Katie said, as she measured a spoonful of sugar and stirred it into the pan of milk. Katie was calm and matter-of-fact, even about her father.

Shane sat down on the kitchen stool, suddenly soothed and relaxed. Her eyes pleaded with Katie. "It'll be such a good thing you're home again. Ma needs it, and you know how to handle Pa."

"You don't handle Pa. You leave him be."

By the middle of the afternoon, they had almost finished packing the two suit boxes and the old traveling case. They had laughed and felt a little excited about moving. If Katie hated going back, her laughter covered it up, and when Bobby came trudging up the back stairs, she asked him, while she helped him change his clothes, if he had been a bad boy, playing in the ash heaps on the empty lot. She talked just as though nothing unusual was happening. Only once was Shane afraid that Katie would spoil the good front she had kept up so far. "I'm leavin' all but the clothes and baby's things," Katie said. "There's the furniture and dishes and Bert's radio and the pink lamp . . ."

"I'll sell it all Monday," Shane interrupted her quickly. She was down on her knees, tying a box with odd lengths of twine. In that moment, her mind was tightly packed, the blood running full in her head, as she bent forward, with aching fear for Katie's morale. "We'll manage swell," she said. "The three of us can carry everything. Bobby'll help, won't you?"

The little boy looked uncomfortable in long trousers and a jacket that was too tight for him. He went to the window ledge

and hung from it with his grubby little hands, his knees wobbling against the wall.

"You're gettin' to be a regular guy, ain't you, Bobby?" Shane helped him put on a coat, the sleeves tugging at his jacket. Then she took command. "I'll carry the baby and the suitcase. You can take the two boxes and Bobby can carry his box."

"Don't scuff your shoes," his mother warned him, as they left.

On the train ride out of Chicago, while Katie watched over the baby, Shane took charge of Bobby. She showed him how to get a drink of water from the paper cups in the slot at the end of the car, and she read a book of comics to him. The two sisters did not talk together. When their eyes met, there was no exchange of expression, because each knew how the other felt.

They walked the mile from the station to the farm, Shane stopping every once in a while to shift the baby higher on her arm.

"If anyone was to notice us, they'd sure feel sorry for us," she laughed. "You O.K., Bobby?"

"Wish we had my pop's car," the little boy whined.

It was hard to walk through the cold wind which bowled over the frozen fields along the road.

When they arrived at the Kearneys' farm, Mrs. Kearney came to the door as if she had been expecting them. They dropped their bundles and the baby began to cry.

"Well, Katie," Mrs. Kearney greeted her daughter, "you look tired. Goodness, the baby sure cries." She took the child from Shane and jiggled it as she had done to all her own chil-

dren. The baby quieted down.

"Hey!" Shane pointed an accusing finger at Bobby's soiled feet. "Clean 'em up before you come in here."

Katie looked apologetically at her mother as she dampened a handkerchief with her tongue and tried to clean Bobby's grimy face. "You didn't expect us, Ma; did you?"

Mrs. Kearney's eyes had quickly seen that Katie had come to stay. Unblinking, her face expressionless, she had looked over the bundles and then taken the baby into her arms. She seemed now, as she often did, not to have heard what Katie said. Rather, she answered the question indirectly.

"I got enough for everyone, I guess."

Shane went to the stove and took the cover from an iron kettle. "Soup." She held her face over the dampening, fragrant steam. "With meat in it. And bread in the oven."

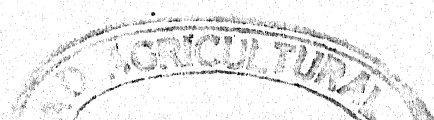
"And a little extra ham to slice," Mrs. Kearney added. It would be a special supper.

"Don't that sound nice, Bobby?" Katie pushed the hair out of her little boy's eyes.

"Yup." Bobby made sputtering sounds with his mouth and pushed his mother's hand away from his face. "I'm goin' to play in the barn." He ran out, slamming the door and sending a last cold current of air through the room.

"Where's Pa?" asked Katie, raising her head a little, as she stood in the middle of the old kitchen and smelled the soup, the bread, the scrubbed wood of the floor and the damp oil-cloth. The smell was the same now as it had been ten and twenty years ago.

"I told you he didn't feel so good yesterday." Shane sent a meaningful glance at her sister. "But he'll prob'ly be up and around for dinner. I don't pay no attention when he gets like



that." Her words were explicit, as if she were instructing Katie and giving her advice. Then they fell silent, as they got the supper ready, and Mrs. Kearney sat with the baby in the porch rocker they brought into the kitchen during the winter.

Mrs. Kearney sat in a chair, while her girls worked around the kitchen. She was feeling festive. "Got nothin' to say?" she invited conversation. The November wind fell heavy against the kitchen window, making the pane of glass shudder. Then it moved away. The fire in the wood stove ticked and cracked, splitting the warm air with fine sound. She looked down at the baby sleeping against her with its soft mouth open a little and the eyelids so tender, the bluish color of skim milk. Then she watched her girls cutting the fresh bread, making coffee, setting out plates, Katie opening the wrong cupboards to find salt and sugar.

No, they had nothing to say. It seemed to Mrs. Kearney that whenever she brightened a little, felt pleasure stirring in her weary soul, her family never understood her slight, meagerly indulged happiness. When she got one of her kids to go to church with her, she rejoiced, but whoever was with her could hardly wait for the service to be over. When Mr. Kearney was sober, she was grateful, and he was miserable. Now both her daughters were home with her, and if you had looked in the kitchen window and seen Mrs. Kearney rocking and cuddling the baby, you might have thought God had given her everything back. But her unblinking eyes stared without focus and her thin mouth curved down slightly, as she realized that once again her happiness was nobody else's. Shane worked in the city now, leaving every morning before daylight and coming home late, tired and shaken. Mrs. Kearney knew that Shane hated the farm, too, just like her other children had at this

age, that she wanted to be like city folks. Nor could Katie share her lonely joy, either. Katie had been chastened severely, Mrs. Kearney knew, from what little Shane had told her. She had come home, and that gave Mrs. Kearney something to be joyful about, but she had come home pitiful.

Mrs. Kearney stopped rocking. "You hold the baby, Katie," she said.

"Now, Ma, sit still," Shane scolded.

"No." Mrs. Kearney was firm-minded about work. "I got to pick the eggs."

"You do that twice a day?" The unbelieving tone in Shane's voice teased her mother. "Why them few chickens couldn't lay one egg between 'em after eight o'clock in the morning."

Mrs. Kearney did not smile.

In the evening when the two children and Mr. Kearney were in bed, Mrs. Kearney ironed and Shane made stuffing for Sunday's chicken, while Katie sat in the rocker. The smell of hot milk, the moistened bread, onions and sage which Shane worked with her strong fingers, and the faint scorched smell of steam from the ironing board filled the room with the air of work, so that their silence was natural. Katie rocked, her head inclined against the old-fashioned wooden spindles, her eyes on her mother whose back was turned. The hair at the nape of the older woman's neck was pulled in taut gray strands to the top of her head. The curve of her ears and neck were pale cream color, while her fingers, grasping the handle of the iron and the edge of the shirts and towels, were dark pink and stained, as if with beet juice, from years of hard work with water and the wood stove. Bending over the clothes which she ironed with neat, deliberate pressure, Mrs. Kearney was like

a deaf-mute, absorbed with her work, but thinking of many things which she would never have to reveal. Mrs. Kearney set the iron on its holder with a clank and took another shirt from the basket.

"Is there going to be enough room for you and the kids here, d' you think?" Shane asked her sister.

"Well, we haven't got much stuff," Katie began. Then she realized Shane's thought. "Sure there'll be enough room. I guess I wouldn't of come if I thought we couldn't manage."

Shane added milk to the dressing and put her hands in it again. "What if I give you my room?"

"It will seem strange not to have you in your own room we gave you when you was a little girl," Mrs. Kearney said.

Mrs. Kearney was talking as if Shane had decided to leave the farm. She was anticipating the sadness she would feel when her youngest left, and she talked as if she knew Shane would be leaving soon. Whenever Mrs. Kearney anticipated sadness, Shane could usually make a little joke or gently scoff, to scare away the banshee. But this time she could do nothing. Shane took her hands from the chicken stuffing and turned to look at Katie, as if for help. She began, "Katie, alone with the kids, had to come home like this, and now I, with my job, might hafta go into Chicago, because it would make it easier that way."

"Where you planning to live?" Katie was helping her.

Shane looked at the side of her mother's face and saw that there was no more sadness in the corners around her eyes and mouth than usual, so she spoke brightly, with suppressed excitement.

"With you leavin' the flat," she tried to penetrate her reasoning through to Katie, at least, "I could just move in. It would

be a trade." Now that she had spoken up, she had to think about what she had said. She put her hands back in the bowl.

Katie, who had been rocking placidly, as if she had not been listening, began talking in her slow, now colorless voice. "When I left home, it was different, wasn't it, Ma?" she said. "I didn't leave home for no job, so's I could make more money for you folks. I was crazy then, Ma. Bert and me was wild, I guess. And," she tried to laugh, but the evenness of her words wasn't sustained so easily now, "maybe we all knew it wouldn't work out."

Mrs. Kearney ironed more heavily, a mute protest to this kind of talk.

"I don't mind much coming back," Katie went on. "Seems like I always knew I would come back to the farm. Maybe we all belong here."

"I guess none of us is sure where we belong." Shane felt wise and old for having said that. She was thinking of her mother now, trying to counteract the sorrow before it came. "Look at Ma. She ain't in Ulster, or else you might think she belonged there. And I don't belong in Chicago maybe, but I'll prob'bly move there. I wouldn't go except I'm near home," she added. "Ma, you know what Chicago makes me feel?" She was trying to "brighten it" for her mother, and she was excited. "Being in Chicago makes me feel like a fighting Irishman. You should hear them call me a mick." It was the wrong thing to say.

"Go wake your Pa and tell him that. Don't tell me."

The words had come before she could stop them. "I'm sorry, Ma."

"Is there a young man you're after?"

"Oh, Ma!" Shane pretended to wince. "You know me. I'm steerin' clear of that. No boy friends for me. I ain't like other

girls." She was chattering now and deftly stuffing the chicken. She was trying to make everything seem bright and easy. "I know Bert's kind, and I'm steerin' clear of his type."

Now Katie bristled. "You could easy make the same mistake," she said. "I didn't have to try so hard to get into trouble."

"Look at Ma and the man she married." Not wanting to hurt Katie, she thought she would say something to make her mother happy. "Through 37 years it is, and they stuck it out, even though they could of just as easy give it up."

"It ain't so easy to give up a man, is it, Ma?" Katie asked her mother for help.

"I don't know," Mrs. Kearney said.

"Besides," Katie looked at Shane, "Pa never run out on Ma." She knew Shane was too young to understand. "Aw, we forget," she helped her mother fold up the ironing board. "That's what I'm counting on."

"Sure, you forget," Shane said happily.

Katie laughed at her. "What do you know about it?"

Shane felt ashamed, because she knew Katie had forgiven her for saying mean things. Katie laughed again. "Shany, you can have my furniture. There's nothing else I can do with it, I guess. You can have the flat. You're in the dough and you kin afford to live there better'n I kin."

For her mother's sake, Shane pretended that she had not decided for sure to move. "I'll think it over," she said, and she pushed her hands hard into her apron pockets to stave off her excitement.

Shane was the last one in bed. She jerked the string that pulled out the bedroom light and lay down next to Katie under the feather quilts her mother had patched. Nuzzling her head in the pillow, she heard the pulse that beat in her throat when

she was excited. Experimentally she changed the position of her head, but she still heard the pulse, and she loved the excitement of it. Beside her, Katie stirred a little, indicating that Shane could talk if she wanted to.

"Is it O.K., Katie?" Shane whispered.

"What?"

"Me leavin' Ma."

"You leave Ma to me." Katie turned over and sighed deeply in preparation for sleep.

Shane's mind sobered at the sad sound of what Katie had said. It was as if they were tricking their mother. But excitement overran her again. "Katie," her whisper was insistent, "I wanna do it soon."

"Go in and give it a try tomorrow night, whyn't you?"

"Could I?" Unable to lie still, she sat up. "I could go in tomorrow and stay at your place and go to work Monday morning from your place, couldn't I?"

"It ain't my place no more. It's yours."

"I'm scared," Shane hissed. "And what about the rent?"

"Bert paid it for this month. Say, before I forgit it," Katie sounded as if she were talking in her sleep, "I left a red hat on the closet shelf. You kin have it."

A place to live in Chicago, a new job, a new hat. "I'm scared." Shane transposed a wail into a whisper.

"Give it a try, like I say." Katie groaned with sleepiness. "Pretend you're a Chicago kid. Pretend you know all about how it is in the big city."

Shane sat shivering, her arms tight across her knees.

Before she went to sleep, Katie murmured, "Ain't you thinkin' of a man? Ain't that the reason you wanna live there?"

"No special guy," Shane said, thinking of a nice boy friend

calling for her on a Saturday night. She would avoid men like Bert, unshaven, restless men who read racing forms and looked at the girls and hadn't any strong Irish blood in them. She was proud of the Irish blood that pulsed in her temples and made her deaf in sleep but still busy in her mind. She sank back under the warm quilt and, as she fell asleep, her thoughts began to wander subconsciously onto the streets of Chicago.

Chapter 5

IT WAS raining Sunday night, when Shane got off the train, and there were almost three miles of long city blocks from the 126th Street Station to Katie's flat, but she wanted to walk them. As she strove, against the wind with her head down and facing away from the street, to protect herself from the rain, she saw rows of rickety wooden houses, like odd-shaped boxes tumbled along the street in the darkness and cold November rain. Each block had a different quality. Here there were delicatessens, crackling blue neon signs in undertaker's windows, ailanthus branches reaching like bony, black arms over fences or between brick walls. Old women walked close to the buildings with heavy, side-to-side weariness, wearing paunchy shoes, holding their coat collars tight at the throat. When Shane was halted at the curb, she held up her head to notice the name of the street, crossed the rain-slippery pavement and held her head down again, to see what people there were in the new block and how they lived. She noticed iron railings, orange-lit entrances, a man standing at a window in a striped shirt with no tie and his hair ruffled, sailors and girls leaning against the walls out of the rain. In the next block there was a billboard at the corner with the face of a man half torn off, and in the middle of the block was a tavern with green shades pulled, and

laughing, jostling, polka music coming through the narrow door. In an alleyway sat an old man on a box in the shadow, with little to identify him but his black form and the cane he had carefully placed against the wall which caught light from the street lamp. When she stopped on the curb of that block, she noticed part of a newspaper stuck, like cheap cloth, to the wet pavement. The print on the paper was a kind she had never seen before. There were other changes in the blocks she covered, but they ran into and through one another. Here, there were the voices of colored people laughing behind uncurtained, brightly lit windows or giggling and shrieking in barber shops, little general stores and dark tenement courts.

She turned a corner, and there were cinders under her feet, as she passed the boarded wall of a factory shop, with a sign saying No Admittance nailed to it. At the end of the block was a gas station with triangular flags hanging up and down from gasoline pumps to the station roof. Then the street was lost in the large single shadow of flat-topped apartment houses built side to side.

At her entrance, familiar as Katie's place, unfamiliar as her own, Shane rummaged in her purse for her keys. That was something she had always wished she could do, from watching other people rummage for theirs. She did it expertly, as if she had always come home from work to the same old place, had searched for her key, pushed the door open, climbed the stairs, unlocked her own door, making that familiar sound in the lock, walked in, slamming the door and leaving whoever may have heard her come in to wonder what this girl did when she first got home. Did she take off her wet hat and coat, hang them over the register and glance in the mirror? She may have kicked off her shoes and fallen in the old chair, or perhaps she

was supposed to do her nails, write a letter, or rearrange a drawer or read a magazine story or wash her hair. Whoever heard a respectable girl come home after work expected her to do any of these things. Shane knew this, for she walked upstairs and slammed the door and turned on the light, as if it were the usual thing and she had always lived in Chicago.

If, when she walked into her own flat, there had been furnishings she had never seen before, arranged differently from Katie's things, she would have gone on pretending that there was a new person in herself, living suddenly the way all Chicago girls lived, or as she imagined they lived. But when she was up inside the pink-lit living room and alone, she stood still in her damp clothes and took a long look, as if she were sadly bewitched, at the sagging couch, the old Morris chair, the big, ornate radio. They were the things she remembered from the times she had come to Chicago to see Katie. They were unchanged links between herself, the Irish girl come to the city, and her sister, father and mother on the farm.

Slowly she walked through the apartment to see what things Katie had left. As she looked through the cupboards and drawers, she noticed in the rooms the same heavy silence she had heard alone so often in the farm kitchen or parlor late at night or early in the morning, and the thought that some things could not be changed by her coming to Chicago passed over her. Like a ghost following her and whispering to her was the thought that part of her still belonged to her mother and to her father, too. Her father would always talk with a brogue, no matter how far from Ireland he was. Her mother would always be a hard-working woman from Ulster, too proud of her Scotch blood to mention it. Her conscience had Shane ready to cry, as she remembered how sad her mother must be feeling

because her youngest was glad to leave.

Shane took off her coat and hung it among the rattling hangers in the closet. Looking up to the shelf, she saw the red hat which Katie had told her she could have. She took it down. It was thin, hard felt with a wide brim and a white feather glued stiffly, like lacquered hair, around the back of the crown. Katie had always worn bright clothes. Shane was just beginning to need them, the way you do if you're in good Chicago style. She took her purse to the bureau mirror and, after combing her hair, tried on the hat. Her fingers curled around her dark red hair and the scarlet brim, as she looked from one side to the other, like an automaton in a show window. The bright red cried out with the color of the hair around her face. She stared at her flamboyant self in the mirror. Mrs. Kearney told her once that her eyes had never changed from the color they were when she was a baby. They were the same strong blue color. From the iris into the white, a faint blue rim had seeped, making them round and soft under the tender skin of her eyelids.

She looked at herself in the mirror for a long time, the tan bedroom walls and abandoned furniture reflected from behind her, her finger tips resting on the bureau. Her eyes held in them the confused thought that she had deserted her family and the Irish in her retorted that she should not desert herself. Just because she was not exactly where she belonged yet, she thought, breaking up the vision in the mirror by bending her head down and taking off the hat, was no reason why she should feel lost. This was a sensible thought which persuaded her not to sit on the bed and brood over herself, but to walk into the living room and open the package of clothing she had carried from home.

But she kept thinking of the long walk from the station tonight through unfamiliar neighborhoods full of the sights and smells and angles of Chicago which were overlaid and filled with the air of people and countries foreign to her. Away from the farm and on her own, she wasn't any more lost than the thousands—there must have been thousands—of people whom she had seen that night or the people whose homes and stores and rubbish she had seen. But she still had the lonely feeling that she was unique. In all of Chicago tonight there was probably no other girl who had left her farm and moved into her sister's apartment to get closer to her job. There was no other girl so Irish and determined—and uncertain. She went back to the bureau and tried on the red hat again.

Chapter 6

ROSE and her friends ate lunch sitting on a long workbench at one end of which radio parts were stacked. There were Rose and Lillian, the blonde woman, Stella, and a girl named Jackie. Jackie knew the private lives of movie stars from having been an attendant in a restroom in a high-class New York department store.

"Tell my new pal here, Shane Kearney, about them movie stars, will yuh, Jackie?" Rose asked, to kind of break the ice for Shane.

"Oh, certainly," Jackie said. "I saw so many of them you know. Besides Ingrid Bergman and Joan Crawford and many others, I, personally, saw Mrs. Darryl Zanuck and Mrs. George S. Kaufman."

"What about Ingrid Bergman?" Stella opened her mouth wide and took a large bite from a rye bread sandwich.

"Well," Jackie said, "she has that fresh-washed look, you know. And she wore merely a simple suit and a mink coat. She didn't wear no make-up at all, maybe a little lipstick."

"Imagine!" Rose nudged Shane. The little mick was so wide-eyed and quiet.

"Dietrich is a terrible fright," Jackie continued, as she ate a plate of cold spaghetti which she brought in a tin box, "also,

Joan Crawford is a horror. And I heard about Laurence Olivier from my girl friend who worked with me. She said how terrible conceited he is."

"My brother used to make a face like Ben Turpin," Rose said, for Shane's benefit. "My God, how he could make me laugh!" She took an apple from her sack of lunch, bit a rotten place from it and spat it on the floor. "He's been all over the map, the no-good bum." He sounded like Bert. Shane wished she could tell Rose about Bert.

Shane folded the brown paper in which she had wrapped her sandwiches. The feeling of the greasy paper and the dust on the table and the strange women drinking coffee out of bottles, talking so freely and loudly, revived the sensation of awkwardness which she had known her first days in the factory.

"Get up at three o'clock this morning as usual?" Rose asked.

"Nah, I'm livin' in Chicago now." Trying to seem nonchalant about it made Shane feel all the more uneasy. But Rose helped. Rose was the girl for her to tell things to, Shane decided. Rose was swell.

"Now you're talkin', honey. So you moved in the big city! Listen," Rose was genuinely pleased about it, "if there's anything you wanna know, anything I can do, any advice you need, you come to me."

"O.K., I will," Shane said. "I been meanin' to ask you, anyway," Shane was kidding, "does any drunks ever bother you around here?"

"Who would bother me?" When Rose laughed, all her long teeth showed. "Any drunk can see that I look like a horse."

"I guess I'm safe then, hah?" Shane was feeling happier. "And another thing. I ain't afraid of dirt. I'm used to chickens around the place and all like that, but what gets me is the

greasy dirt in Chicago."

"Oh, sure," chorused the other women, who had only been listening to Rose and Shane. Now they were all friends. They all agreed that Chicago was dirty, something fierce.

Rose walked back to Shane's line with her, when they saw by the clock that the bell would ring in a little while. This was the period in the day when hectic friendliness surged through the factory, just before the machines turned on again and put a stop to sociability. The department sounded like a zoo. Calls, screeches, laughter and shuffling feet echoed as some of the girls practiced jitterbugging or shouted at the men who played tricks on them. Others sat like birds on the machines and work tables, chattering, staring out of the windows, their feet swinging, or reading newspapers.

Shane and Rose had been putting ball bearings in cylinders all morning, so Shane guessed they'd do the same thing this afternoon, until Michel came up from behind her and slid his hand around her waist.

"No funny business, you." Reddening, she pushed him away.

"Calm yourself, take it easy." By pretending to soothe her, he knew that he maddened her. "I just wanted you to know you're gonna broach links this afternoon." With that, he turned away. Before she could realize the full disappointment of having to leave Rose and go back to broaching links, she heard a scuffling which drew the attention of several of the workers who were standing around.

Michel had turned on Pete and was trying to drag him over to take a look at Shane. Pete was smiling uncomfortably and, to hide his embarrassment, playfully, lightly punched Michel in the ribs. The men who heard laughed when Michel called him some dirty name, and Pete blushed. Michel was

ready to fight Pete, but from Pete there was no sign, not a flicker of interest, to show that he would go into a fight. There was only the muscle in his cheek, moving in and out like a pulse. Then he raised his eyebrows slightly when he looked up at the people standing around him. The bell rang and the crowd scattered. Pete walked past Shane and looked at her once out of the corner of his eye, but it was politely done.

"Who is that guy?" Shane asked Rose.

"Some Hungarian that Frenchie calls Hungry," Rose said. "He worked at this factory a long time and then he lit out for California. Come back just the other day. Him and Frenchie don't get along. Yuh know," Rose looked thoughtful, "I seen him often, worked on the line with him, and believe it or not, I never once seen him make a pass at a girl—I never seen him once. He can look at you funny, but he don't do nothin' about it." As she said it, she sounded as if she could hardly believe it.

"That Michel," Shane's eyes narrowed, "he's a caution." She had felt sorry for the Hungarian. He looked so nice. "Well, see you later," Shane said. "I'm gonna break the rate broaching links."

Shane put her hands to their work, thinking, "Take up link, put it under the stem of press, put the needle in place, the link in the box on this side of the press." This time it was going right.

Three hours drew by, and it seemed then that it was not her hands which were doing the work but the links and the handle of the press that were alive in her hands. She forgot herself, didn't dare break the rhythm of the work. She was learning, and it was like magic, this sudden catching on to how the machines should be handled.

Frank Hendler strolled over to her.

"You're getting the swing of it, hah?" His voice seemed far away through the sound of the machines. "My name is Frank. You know me. You've seen me around." He smiled slowly and shifted his weight.

She waited to see what this no-good bum was going to do to her.

"Go ahead. I just like to watch, that's all." He said it quickly in a high, artificial tone of voice.

"I don't get what you mean," she said cautiously.

"I mean," he gave up smiling, "if I was you I wouldn't beat the rate."

Across the aisle, Shane saw the blonde woman watching them.

"Sure I have beat the rate." Her voice strained to shout above the noise. "Almost double." She began to work again.

"Wait a minute." He put his white hand, warm with oil, over hers on the handle of the press. "Now you're bein' a little company girl."

"So what?" She could not understand what he was trying to say. Moreover, she didn't like the looks of the guy.

"I don't mind seeing you work that way." He sounded as if he were teaching her simple arithmetic. "But what the other people on the line gonna think? They ain't gonna like it one bit."

"So they'll get mad at her. Let her alone, Brains." Michel came between them like an excited rooster. "Brains here don't mind his own business, do yuh, Brains." Michel pretended to confide in Shane. "He thinks he gotta take care of things around here." Michel winked at Hendler, as the younger boy turned

and shuffled back to his place on the line.

Shane had had enough. "Leave me alone!" She laughed and the blood in her cheeks was hot with anger. "I'll call the big boss on you—the big foreman."

"Listen, baby," Michel's thick-lidded brown eyes half closed, as he tipped off Shane, "just take it easy, is all. I'm a worker here myself just like the rest. We'll put out 250 tachometers every day just like we always. Now so far, you were about like the rest of us, but this afternoon I noticed you put on a little speed. You're wisening up to the job. Well, don't put on too much speed. That's all."

After he left her, Shane stood up and went back to see Rose. This was more than she could understand.

"I broke the rate back there. I was doin' fine."

"That's the spirit, kid," Rose said. "You don't want the others to have it in for you, though."

"What's wrong with beating the rate?" Shane was mad.

"Well, I'll tell yuh. It never hurts to keep the rate down. You get wore out if you put it up, least most people do, except me. I work fast as anybody in this factory, which ain't sayin' much. But if I had any brains I wouldn't be workin' so fast in this hole. I'd be workin' on a piece rate somewheres. That's when it pays to break the rate, when you're on a piece rate. But not around here. Don't let it worry you, kid. Say," seeing Shane so confused and mad, she felt like doing her a good turn, something to welcome her to Chicago. "Why don't you have supper with me in my room tonight. How would you like that?"

"I'd like it swell. Thanks, Rose." Whatever happened in the factory, Rose would always act like a good friend.

The boarding house where Rose had a room was in the Polish neighborhood, between the Irish and Italian districts. It was just another dark frame house, steep front stairs sagging to the sidewalk, gray windows fringed with cheap lace curtains. It overlooked a narrow asphalt pavement where children played, squealing and wailing, running and fighting or hovering over some broken toy they had found at the curb, and where the rampant cold November wind spun the soot in the gutters, dragged a torn bushel basket a little way, sent flappy newspapers floating and tumbling down the street.

When Rose opened the front door and Shane walked in, the sad, cold sound of the wind and the voices of the skinny little ragamuffins shrank back, and in its place a strong smell of mildew, strangely dank in the dark, overheated hall, gave Shane the alien feeling of not having known that people lived like this. Under her feet was a worn carpet, not the shrunken wood of a tenement floor.

"Glad you could come," said Rose, leading the way up the stairs.

A boarding house was different from a flat, Shane sensed immediately, because the people in it lived separately, yet lived together like at home. If a man beat up his wife in a flat, the people upstairs would hear it and they'd gossip, but they'd never do anything about it, except call the police maybe. If a fight started in a boarding house, Shane imagined that all the bedroom doors would fly open and everyone would come running out and stop the fight or maybe get in an argument and start another one themselves. Then the landlady would come out in an old bathrobe and slippers and put a stop to the whole thing. It would be real Chicago fun. What she imagined, she got from a movie she had seen about an actor's board-

ing house in New York.

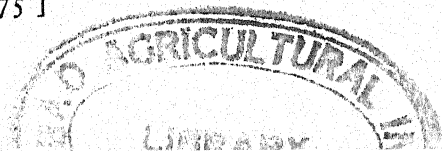
It was quiet right now with the stairs creaking and the lights dim, but she imagined it could be pretty lively around, with Rose and all.

"I ain't much for company, livin' in a dump like this," Rose said, as they trudged up the long flight of stairs with identical rhythm. "You can't put on the dog much in this kinda place, but," she went down the hall to her door and swung it wide, so that it banged against the wall, "it's home to me." They walked inside, and Rose closed the door. "Always close my door around here. 'F I leave it open, first thing you know, one of the girls would be comin' in borrowin' somethin' and being pesty. Not that I mind people, but I just don't invite them to annoy me. Sometimes they annoy me stiff."

Wanting to see what the girls looked like in a place like this, Shane was disappointed that Rose had closed the door. She guessed that Rose was so used to fun, that she closed the door on it, didn't especially want it.

Politely, she looked around the room. It was small, with one window. Against one wall was a cot covered by a monk's cloth bedspread. There was a wicker porch chair and a dresser on which stood a tinted portrait of a girl with spit curls around her face, smiling over her shoulder, and a full-length picture of a sailor, standing under a fake palm tree at some amusement park concession. On the wall over her bed hung a Madonna framed by ornate, gold-painted tin. In the corner was a one-burner oil stove and a breadbox on a stand.

Rose lit the oil stove, and as she talked good-naturedly about what a hole it was she was living in, she opened a can of beans, put them in an enamel saucepan and peeled three slivers of bacon from a half-finished package. Shane, sitting in the wicker



chair and looking around at the worn, dark furniture, arranged so symmetrically in the orderly room, said, "It's nice in here, clean and nice. I ain't afraid of dirt, either. I like to keep things clean. Yuh know, Rose, like I told you the other day, I'm used to chickens around the place and all like that, but it's the greasy dirt in Chicago. That's what gets me. But you got it nice in this little place. Honestly, Rose," it felt good to be talking to her as she would to a real friend, "it's when I'm walkin' along an' see all the dirt in the city streets and them differ'nt-looking foreigners, I feel terrible about Chicago."

"To hell with Chicago," Rose said, surprising Shane who thought, by the tidy order of her room, that common people's dirt would disgust Rose. "Pretty soon you just get so's you don't notice filth."

"Well, you sure got it nice an' clean in here," repeated Shane, her eyes carefully noticing, as a compliment to Rose, the magazines neatly lined up on the radiator, the rug swept clean, little boxes arranged on the dresser. "I like it here," Shane said.

Rose who had been preoccupied with making their supper was almost ready to serve it now. "You wanna wash your hands?"

"Yes, thanks, I think I would." Shane felt polite and ladylike.

Rose showed her the door and told her to knock, because there were some gents living on their floor, too. "It may look like a dump, but we're respectable, though," she called after Shane. "No goings on."

Shane knocked, and a woman's voice said, "Come in." Hair in curlers, creaming her face, she was probably getting ready to go out. "'M I in your way, honey?" the woman asked. Her voice was the only human thing about her. Her face seemed impossible, with the white cream all over it, even over her eyes,

and her hair spiked up. "Usually there's such a crowd in here, you can't put on your make-up decent." They held a polite, nice little conversation.

When she came back, Shane said, "I bet you like livin' here," and she sat down on the bed in front of the card table with the supper put out on it. "I would."

"There's a vacant room up the hall," Rose sang, as if she were offering Shane a last chance to take it, "and we could eat together."

"How much do you pay for this?" To hide her pleasure at the idea of living with Rose, she asked this Chicago-like question.

"Five bucks and it's robbery, but you can't do no better and be decent anywheres around here."

"You're sure decent here." Rose was a swell, friendly person. The beans tasted good. "I like this place." She was thinking about the woman with cold cream on her face, how friendly she had been, about the doors up and down both sides of the hall to rooms, each with a different occupant. Blended with these thoughts were the dreams of having a boy friend on a Saturday night, of being like other Chicago working girls, and having fun.

"How much do you pay for your sister's place?"

For a reason she didn't know, Shane felt that a sore spot had been touched. "My sister's? She pays eight—but I gotta pay it now. I can afford it, now that I'm livin' in the city, though. It ain't bad at all, I s'pose. Three rooms and you got your own bathroom. Course I never expected to stay there permanent, but just until I find another place."

They ate in silence for a moment. In the distance, as though from a back stairway or the attic, was the sudden cry of a

woman laughing. Shane smiled, but Rose didn't seem to notice little things. Through their silence, the woman's laugh seemed to echo, and Shane shivered.

"If I was you I wouldn't move into no place like this," Rose said. "You get awful tired of livin' with jerks around you who's always tellin' you their troubles and moanin' around about there ain't no men."

"It's awful to moan around alone," Shane said.

"Don't you suppose I know it, honey?" Rose sounded rough, but she was kind. "No, if I was you, livin' in Chicago for the first time," Rose's fine, dark eyes narrowed and she carefully closed her mouth over her large teeth, as she tried to calculate how it would feel to be new in the big city, "knowing what I know, I wouldn't wade in blind and try to be like everyone else. They're cheap and tough," she nodded toward the door, "an' I'd stay away from a place like this, if I was you."

"I can take care o' myself, Rose. I been alone enough." It seemed she was always fighting loneliness. "I don't see nothin' wrong with this place."

Out in the hall a woman yelled, "I ain't got all night." Her voice was abstracted by the silence in the hall.

Rose turned to the door, as if someone were standing there. "Aw, shut up," she said.

Shane laughed. "Well, how come you're livin' here, if you don't like it?"

"There ain't no place else better." Rose stacked their dishes and stood up. She was tall, and the bones of her thin arms and legs were long and hard-looking under the sallow skin, but there was gentle composure in the angularity of her gaunt face, resignation to her own ugliness in the shapeless tan wool dress, the plain oxford shoes, the pale color of her large, unpainted

fingernails.

"Oh, sure," she said, pushing the garbage off the plates into a tan paper sack, "I get along swell with everyone in this place, but they bore me stiff with their whining about they ain't heard from their boy friends and their old lady is sore at them and could they borrow this, that, and the other." Rose, bending over the worktable and breadbox in the shadowed corner, seemed too tall for the small, confining room.

Shane took a chance. "I hate livin' alone at my sister's and she's got three rooms, living room, kitchen, bedroom, none of 'em bigger than this, but you got more than one place to sit down in . . ."

Rose straightened, and her smile was broad, as she waited for Shane to go on.

"Whadye think? Don't you think it would be swell, Rose?" She stood up. They were both excited.

"Two can live cheaper than one," Rose said. "Ain't it a shame we got no husbands to support us in style?"

In the midst of their laughter, the front door of the boarding house slammed and footsteps were heavy on the stairs.

"We'll manage swell," Shane said. "We'll have a gay time. Better 'n here. Ain't that right, Rose?"

"That's right, Shane."

Through the wall was the sound of a sharp clap.

"Nobody ain't home," Rose yelled, opening the door. "Did you knock?" Her voice was muted, as she leaned out into the hall. "Oh, it's them things. Why don't you leave 'em in the basement where they belong? You're gonna kill somebody some day with them poles and things."

The murmur of a low voice answered Rose. She laughed and opened the door wider, so that Shane could see. A young

man stood in the dim light, facing the end of the hall, one foot ahead of the other, as though he wanted to continue walking but Rose had detained him. He was dressed for winter, balancing a pair of skis and ski poles on his shoulder and carrying a rucksack. He wore ski boots with woolen socks rolled over them, ski pants, a heavy black woolen shirt and a ski cap. Although he was shorter than an average man and squarely built, his body appeared to be supple, as he relaxed, with his weight on one foot. The black wool material of his ski pants pulled taut from his narrow hips to the heavy socks. The ski cap, which was pulled down level with his forehead, shadowed the sunburnt features of the young man's face.

"Now that you're back, I'm gonna move," Rose said, but he didn't seem to take to kidding, for there was no motion or change of shadow over his face.

"Well, that's too bad," he said slowly. "When did you decide this?"

"Just now."

"You are lucky to find another place," he said.

He had a funny accent. Shane looked at the skis and the canvas bag, the outfit he had on and decided that he must work in a side show or something, like them guys that wear satin shirts and riding pants and drive motorcycles around a wooden wall in the carnival.

"Shane, this here is Thure Larsson," Rose introduced them. He propped his skis against the wall, took off his cap, and nodded.

"He's a Swede." Rose acted as interpreter. "Been up North this week end. A great one for skiing." She turned to Thure, "She's workin' in the factory now, too. Useta live on a farm."

"Why did you leave the farm?" he asked.

Just as Shane was about to explain, he put his cap on, took up his skis and walked down the hall.

"Most unsociable guy," Rose said. "Lives on this floor, but he don't look at a girl twice. Prob'ly got some Svenska flicka back in Sweden. The kids think he's a queer the way he ignores them. Nice fellow. Smart."

"Whadye mean a nice fellow?" Shane couldn't see that kind of a guy. "He ain't even polite." She searched in her mind a moment for something she had heard about Swedes. "The dumb Swede," she said. "Acts like the dopes off the farm I useta go to school with. Dresses queer, too. Rose," she changed the subject, "when you goin' to move to my place? I wisht you'd do it right away."

"Soon as you say," Rose said.

Before Shane left to go home, Rose had agreed to move into the apartment the next Thursday night. In their minds they had rearranged the living room furniture which Shane had described, divided the closet and drawer space, cleaned the whole place up and painted it. Then they had planned a party, including all Rose's friends. "And who'll I invite?" Shane had wondered.

"Pick anyone you want and leave everything to me."

"I pick Pete, that Hungarian fellow," Shane had decided. "You introduce me to Pete, hah, Rose?"

"Sure, kid, I'll innerduce you to Pete."

She had walked down the stairs with Shane. "O.K., kid," she said, leaning against the edge of the front door, one hand on her hip, as she watched Shane walk down the steps and disappear into the wind-heavy night. "Next Thursday is movin' day in the slums," she shouted.

Chapter 7

TUESDAY morning before the factory bell rang, Rose formally introduced Shane to Pete. "Here's the kid I'm gonna be room-mates with," she said. "Her and me is gonna live like rich Jews in our mansion on the West Side, ain't that right, Shane?"

"She talks big." Shane felt bold. She laughed and blushed.

Pete raised his eyebrows, as if he did not understand what they were saying.

"Rose, here, got big ideas, but she ain't gonna pull no fast one on me; me slavin' to keep the place clean and her tearin' the place down with her friends."

"The heck you say. I sure am."

"You sure ain't."

While they talked, they playfully nudged each other, pretending to start a fight, all this to entertain Pete, to show off Shane. It was a waste of her time as far as Rose was concerned but anything for Shane, she figured. She felt she had done her duty and she left, saying, "Don't do nothin' I wouldn't do."

Too shy to talk, Pete looked down the line, while Shane noticed different things about him. His eyes were clear gray, and his hair light brown. He was embarrassed around women, she decided, by the way he kept his eyes down, but he couldn't have been a weak-kneed guy because he had what it took to go to California and back. And he was clean-looking and neat-

dressed, a guy she was proud to stand with and talk to.

Her words came easy, maybe too easy. "We're havin' a party Thursday night," she said, "the night Rose moves in with me, an' . . ." She forgot, then, what else she had planned to say, "how about you an' me . . ."

"Thursday night?" His low voice broke, as he blushed warmly.

"Yeah." Now she felt hot, too. "Next Thursday, why not?" she asked him.

"Yes, that would be O.K., fine." Pete spoke slowly. Neither could think of anything more to say. They parted.

Shane went to work with something new to think about, which made the time go faster. The idea of having Pete for a boy friend grew in her mind, until she had to turn around and look at him, pretending to need the pliers in the tool chest behind her. As she fumbled in the box, she looked up at Pete and down to the tools alternately.

His head was lowered. His fingers worked with tentative delicacy at screwing silver-oiled bolts into roughly drilled metal screws. Concentration on his work enwrapped him. There was precision and neatness about the wings of his nostrils, the pale skin at the part in his neatly brushed, springy hair, the long, narrow shoulders, bone-hard under the soft-tufted tan wool of his sweater. His thin back bent over his work with the taut flex of a sheet of tin. Shane noticed the hard curve of his cheekbone above the hollow of his jaw, the shape of his hand, white against his sweater as he worked with the cylinder parts, and her own fingers trembled, as she searched with them among the tools. Her hands shook so that she could not control their finding the familiar contour of the pliers. What a good-looking boy friend he would make!

By seven o'clock the following Thursday night, Shane and Rose were, as they said, fit to be tied. In the morning at work, Rose had invited Stella and her fiancé, Charlie the lame man, who was always good for a laugh, Jackie, Barry and Thure Larsson, the Swede, who worked in the oil gauge section, to help her move into the flat and warm it, as she said. She arranged to use Charlie's car, because he had some extra gas coupons he was always bragging about. They were all going to meet at her boarding house and then drive over to Shane's flat.

Right after work Shane had met Pete at the time clock and had suggested they go to a dance marathon tonight. She wouldn't have been so forward if Rose had not given her two free admissions which she had got from the man who sold tickets at the baseball game during the summer. It was Rose's idea they go to the Dance Marathon. When Shane had told her that she wished Pete would be her boy friend, Rose had said, "You better be alone with him a while, if you wanna make time."

There was enough time, when she got home from work, to slick up the place for Rose and the gang, before she dressed to go out. At 6:00 o'clock, when it was just getting dusk, she put the dry mop in the corner and looked around the bedroom for a last inspection. Pulling up her apron strap, which always fell off her shoulder, she went to the front window in time to see the moving van, Charlie's car, pull up. It was a Chevy with all the de luxe equipment, a spotlight at the side of the window, like a boutonniere, and silvered wooden letters on the radiator front saying CHARLIE. From the window in the third-floor flat, she watched the car move back and forth and into position

at the curb between two parked cars. Four doors opened wide and everybody got out with painful difficulty. To Shane, they appeared top-heavy and tiny-footed, like midgets, Rose and Barry struggling to move huge boxes to the sidewalk, and the others scampering from one side of the car to the other, waving their arms which looked very long, their mouths opening and closing, like marionettes, arguing at one another over the turret top. The trunk door shot up, lengthening the car almost double, and Thure pulled an ironing board out, then the rocker and the round table. After thrusting their heads in and out of the car windows, pointing and waving their arms, they finally assembled all Rose's stuff, the four doors slammed, the trunk top fell back into place, and, loaded with Rose's chattels, they went into the apartment single file.

The front door swung wide, cold air rushed in and the midgets or marionettes were Rose's five friends filling the apartment with noise and cold air that clung to them and came from their mouths with their words.

So Shane and Rose were fit to be tied. For the first time that she could remember, Katie's apartment was full of people having a good time.

Later while Shane waited for Pete in the lobby of the Dance Marathon, Charlie's voice saying, "Quite a ranch you got here," still spoke in her mind. She still heard in her middle ear the sound of Stella's giggling and Charlie's singing *Roll Out the Barrel* again and again, making them laugh each time. "You run along and meet your boy friend," Rose had said, when Shane had come out of the bedroom, dressed and ready to go, and Shane had been suddenly relieved that all those people knew she had a date. It had made her proud to hear Charlie

ask, "Who's the lucky boy, Red?" and to notice the curious dark look in Barry's kind eyes, when she had answered, "Pete Agarvine."

All afternoon, the thought of her first date with Pete had been present under everything that was said and done, until now, while she waited for him, she felt sick at the completeness of this absorption. Putting her weight on one leg, she extended the other, her high heel lightly poised on the white tiles disfigured by dirty footprints superimposed on one another. Her head felt light under the stiff, red hat, as she looked around the lobby. Nervously suppressing a yawn in her throat, she watched a boy and girl stop at the ticket taker's while he went through his pockets. What does he think of her and what does she think of him? Everything she thought or noticed seemed to have something to do with her and Pete.

Because he was a little late, the excitement of his arrival bore down on her like traffic in the middle of the street, but she came out of it, all clear, when she saw Pete walk in the doorway. She was proud to see that he wore a hat and that he was well dressed in a light blue suit and a dark green overcoat. Clean, slow-moving, he walked up to her, a pale stare in his expressionless eyes, as if he didn't altogether recognize her. Maybe it was the red hat that made her look different. Shane smiled reassuringly, as if she understood that he wasn't used to her yet. Expecting him to excuse himself for being a little late, Shane said nothing as she handed the two free admissions to the ticket taker and put her hand in the thick fold of Pete's dark green overcoat at his thin elbow. There was the smell of a men's furnishings store on him, no rancid smell as from the clothing of most factory workers. None of the marks of the factory were on him, no moist grayness on his forehead, no

black oiliness in the creases at his wrists, no rims of black around his fingernails, marks which were usually organic parts of the factory workers. He was clearly different, all right. Delight at this settled over Shane's face as she began their conversation.

"You ever been here before?" She looked up at the smooth underside of his jaw, her eyes penetrant.

"No, I never been," he said, blushing so that a patch of flesh on his cheekbone revealed itself red from shaving.

Slipping her hand off his elbow, she stepped a little ahead of him and led the way up the narrow stairs that were labeled Balcony, and down the dirty cement aisle to a deserted, therefore exclusive, section of the small stadium. The air of the hall was dim and tremulous with heat and the shrill, hard flute-sounds of organ music for the contestants in the Marathon. An announcer who was standing too close to the microphone talked through the voices of the crowd that raged happily around the first rows of the balcony. Phrases of what he said penetrated the noise: "This very, very lovely audience . . . watch La Trolla and his girl . . . a couple in a very, very bad way . . ."

Having elaborately settled herself, her coat, purse and gloves, Shane carefully concentrated on the dancers.

"You dance?" she asked Pete.

"Oh, I don't know." Pete's voice was so low that Shane could not hear it above the din. Trying to divide her attention as she felt she should, between the contest and Pete, she leaned toward him.

"I didn't get that," she said confidentially.

"If I got to, I guess I dance." He raised his eyebrows in a helpless expression, as if he were cornered and had to dance.

"In our church we don't usually dance. My mother don't like me to, so I never do as a rule. Rose told me about this place. She's sure swell."

Shane felt that it was time to stop talking for a few moments.

Pete took her silence as a signal to lean forward and look around, while Shane watched the contest with polite interest.

The couples, in shirt sleeves and unbuttoned collars and loosely fitting dresses, were dancing with rhythmless fatigue, yet there was a nervous turbulence about the drift of dancers as they moved, unseeing, in and out. In Shane there was suppressed elation, perhaps because all around her was the noise and excitement of the Dance Marathon, while sitting next to her was a polite, quiet, clean boy who wore a smooth-feeling new blue suit. The participants in the contest, life gone out of their arms and legs, clung to one another, tipped, rocked and shifted the weight of their bodies clumsily to keep from falling down on their weak knees. How different from them, Shane noticed, were Pete and she, neatly dressed, securely peaceful, sitting together composedly, strength relaxed in their arms, legs and backs. It seemed natural that he was sitting next to her, his back leaning forward so that the straight line of his shoulder and flat side of his forearm were level with her shoulder and arm, his long legs, narrow, hard ridges in the smooth blue of his trousers, propped apart and his pointed shoes turned out. He looked around at her sitting closely at his side, prim and straight.

"*7up* or *Coca-Cola*?" he asked. He did know the right things to do out in society.

"Either one. I don't care." Shane, too, knew how to be polite. He questioned her again with his eyes.

"It really don't make no difference." With Pete it was easy

to act like a lady.

While he was buying the drinks, Shane stretched imperceptibly to release herself from the taut control of her body. For the first time, she noticed the rows of boys and girls sitting below her. The boys hit at one another, cupped their hands to roar at the contestants, half-stood to see the faces of girls who sat near them laughing over their shoulders, putting their hands to the back of their necks to fluff out their long hair. To Shane there was a dangerously unpredictable wildness about the unguarded crowd. She was right. A boy with slick, curling hair, his face wet with perspiration, had seen her sitting alone and stood up, his great coat twisted at his waist, to cry, "Hello, you red. Oh, you redhead! Lonely? Say, Red, be right up. Hey!" He pretended to climb over the back of his seat, while a friend pulled him by his coattail. With a stone-cold face, Shane dismissed him as fresh, sent him into thin air, as she looked with long-range vision through the smoky atmosphere, proudly defending her red *hát*, her exclusive distance from the floor of the stadium and her boy friend, Pete, who was walking down the aisle with a green bottle of sizzling liquid in each hand. To keep from spilling the *7up*, she held her hand high to take it from him, while he sat down cautiously and sought the straw with his pale mouth. He pulled long drafts from the bottle, tipping it slightly so that some drops fell on his tie. Frowning, he held the tail of the tie out and brushed the wet with his clean, white hand. Quiet and fastidious, but still a man, that was Pete. Forgetting to drink the *7up*, Shane bit the waxen end of the straw. With her escort safely beside her, the noise of the crowd receded, leaving them alone in concentrated silence. He had said so little. In Shane, there was so much to be said that she felt she must do something to dilute the intensity

of their quiet, as they sat apart from the crowd, drinking *7up*. A bell sounded vibrant in the air. It was a signal to Shane, the announcement that the contestants were leaving to rest, and the audience could go down on the floor to dance.

"Let's give it a try." Shane pushed her bottle tight in the fleshy palm of her hand.

Pete looked at her from the side, not releasing the straw from his lips, his eyebrows raised, so that the skin of his forehead crept into wrinkles.

"Oh, I don't know," Shane said, pushing the bottle deeper into the palm of her hand. She was sorry she had started it. "I just thought we might, you know."

Pete let the straw rest, looking down at it, reluctant to see it sink back in the bottle. He turned to Shane. "I never danced so good," he finally said.

"It don't matter." Shane pressed her knees together and pushed her feet against the thin soles of her shoes, hard against the dirty cement floor. The tightening of her muscles, hard restraint of her desire to dance, was such a violent reproach of her own boldness with Pete, the clean, shy boy, that her hand shook. Leaning down to place the bottle on the floor, she tried to hide her disappointment. In her baby eyes, as she raised her head, the vision was blurred, and on her face was an expression of childish sorrow.

Watching her, the flat side of his thin face at a slight angle, Pete saw no self-reproach or sorrow. He had only heard her say, "It don't matter," and his mind, like a heavy revolving wheel, finally turned out the words, "Well, if it don't matter how good I dance, why don't we give it a try." He leaned down to place his empty bottle next to Shane's.

The flow of grief at her indiscretion, turning, rushed back

against itself, like the reverse of a swift river's current. But as she stood up, she pretended to be casual and composed, placing her handkerchief on their bleacher and pacing sideways past Pete to the aisle, where she smilingly waited, the fingers of her hand ready to curl around his elbow.

As they walked down the balcony stairs and through a tunnel to the stadium floor, the hot sound of the organ shook them. From the edge of the floor they were sent, by the propulsion of other dancers, into the center of the hot, noisy stadium.

Now she was one of the thousands of people who belonged in Chicago. She was acting the way they did, dancing with her boy friend, knocking against other working girls and their boy friends.

She had danced before, Saturday nights, in the schoolhouse on the road to town. Those evenings she had worn the same old clothes and never paid much attention to the poorly dressed, weather-ruddy farm boys she had known all her life. Now she wore a red hat, the edge of which she could see when she looked up. Her rouged cheeks burned from the floodlights that spilled on her like sharp, hard rain when she turned her face up. The shrill organ music struck the senses, its deliberate rhythm making a dance of bumping knees and heavy, jerking arms. Thousands of girls who worked in factories were crammed together with their men under a blinding spotlight, girls like her, lucky if they had a boy friend as nice as Pete.

She hid the sight of the rest of the crowd in the close comfort of the sharp-edged lapel of Pete's suit. To protect herself and her sudden shyness of Pete, she took her hand from the seam of his shoulder where it might be touched or knocked by the hands of other couples dancing around them, and she pushed

her finger at the machine-sewn buttonhole of his lapel. It was sewn together. She laughed to herself and poked at it to see if she could push her finger through it, but it was only supposed to look like a buttonhole. Although Pete was there with her, she had almost disassociated the lapel and buttonhole from him. His suit, its smooth, hard blue material close to her warm face, smelling exquisitely but surely like a men's furnishings store, brought him within such close range that he was a wonderful stranger who was dancing with her—unsteadily and with faltering steps—but dancing just the same.

"This ain't like me," she thought to herself. Putting her hand back on his shoulder, she looked up to his solemn face which was stern with self-discipline, as he pondered what steps to take. "Say!" she said to him, "you're a swell dancer. Whadye mean you don't know how to dance?" she scolded him and, looking around, helped him guide her through the mobile aisles made by other dancers who shifted around them.

When the dance period for the audience was over, Shane and Pete walked back to their section of the balcony, weary, their bodies giving off heat; Shane losing her balance so that she bumped, laughing as if she were drunk, against Pete. When they found their place, Pete began putting on his overcoat.

"Wait a minute." Shane was surprised that he had forgotten. "I can't waste this." She leaned down to pick up the green bottle of *7up*. "Oh!" She pretended sadness. "The straw don't work. Well!" She drew the straw from the bottle. "Here goes." Tipping the bottle, her head back, she swallowed the liquid. Her throat, thin bones and firm white-skin, worked the way the throat of a child works when it drinks a whole glass of milk to prove how thirsty it is. She set the bottle down on the floor. "There!" Her voice was husky with the sting of the

drink. "I done it." She smiled up at him, her eyes dim with the tears that come with quenching thirst too harshly.

"Good girl," he said softly, a smile lighting the flat gray of his eyes.

His was a pale smile, almost like that of a sick man who weakly echoes the smile of someone who is amused. He seemed impatient to leave, but Shane was so pleased to have seen his smile that she put on her coat slowly, chattering while he waited for her in the aisle.

Pushing her arm through the sleeve, she said, "I never was one to waste stuff." She thought he had called her "good girl," because she didn't waste the *7up*. "I'm one to look all day for a penny I lose." Waiting for another smile, she pushed the other arm through its coat sleeve. "It's a funny thing about me," she drew on her loose-fitting gloves as if they were tight, pressing down the wrinkles between her fingers, "I can't stand to lose anything, specially if I had a hard time getting it." Before she walked toward him in the aisle, she sent her gloved hands to the red brim of her hat, pulling it down a bit, as she looked at Pete for another smile. "Yep, I guess I'm just an old Scotchman with a fiery Irish temper that gets mad when I got to lose something or waste something." Her under lip slid up over her upper lip, a signal that she was trying to be funny.

He said, "Maybe you didn't get your money's worth here tonight."

Shane thought his smile came through again because he liked the idea of her being careful with money.

"It don't matter if we didn't," Shane said loudly, and laughed to build up her next remark. "We got in free!"

Pete raised his eyebrows. "I know it."

"You're a funny guy." Shane shook her head, as if there were

no hope for him. She was still trying to be funny. With heavy feet, she toiled up the stairs at his side, her head down, pretending that she was worn out and exasperated by Pete. But he was unable to make a joke with her, she could see, so she stopped making fun of him, raised her head and walked naturally.

When she was primly sober, a polite Chicago working girl, her thought went, as if to a magnet, to the strangeness of having a boy friend. She wasn't really used to having a tall boy with a good, clean face walking next to her, taking long, manly steps. As long as he didn't know that he was her first boy friend, she would know how to act, by the very instinct that told her to wait while he opened the door going out on the street.

The air outside was cold, but dry and clear, so that their eyes, when darkness had filtered through them, could find the faint points of stars. Pete stopped to turn up his coat collar; Shane put her purse at her elbow and took Pete's arm. Slowly they walked through the light and dark of the city street. *

"It must be awful late," Shane said into the dark, cold intimacy of their walking together.

"No, it ain't. It's early." He had looked at his watch before they left the Dance Marathon, and Shane had admired the gesture.

She was about to say something when she knew, perhaps by feeling the flesh and bone of his arm through the thick stuff of his coat, that he had something more to say. She waited, measuring with her steps and his the black, cold pavement.

". . . to eat something?" So much of what he said was held with shyness in his throat.

"Did you say we should eat something?" *

He cleared his throat.

This time she could feel, in the set of his long steps next to hers, that he was leading the way to eat somewhere.

They walked into the yellow brick ice-cream place that was set apart from the other darker rickety buildings in the block. It had yellow Venetian blinds and there was a buzzing red neon sign in the window. Side by side on the low stools in front of a black linoleum counter, they quietly studied the menus, not hearing the low voice of the waitress talking with a couple in the booth at their backs or the soft, metallic moan of the little machine that made milk shakes.

"Make mine just plain vanilla," Shane had the courage to say in a low voice, breaking the vacuum of their silence.

Pete had a hamburger and coffee, his long back leaning over the plate and cup with intense, quiet eagerness. The vanilla ice cream, food for which she felt no need, melted in the glass dish. One spoonful had turned cold the courage she needed with a man she wasn't used to.

"We could have gone straight to our place. I got plenty of food in this morning." The sweet milk of the ice cream was cold on her tongue, and it was an effort to speak. "Next time maybe we should do that, huh?"

Pete finished his hamburger, drank the last of the cup of coffee high over his smooth white, flat-boned chin. Pushing away his plate and wiping his hands, he lowered the lids of his eyes and said, "It's your food."

"What's mine is yours, pal." She put her strong hand, its blunt nails pink, on his back and jokingly patted him.

As if for reassurance, she touched the scarlet brim of her hat while Pete paid the bill.

Chapter 8

THEY walked in cold, intimate silence to Shane's apartment. At the door, Pete hesitated, like a fleshless, ghostly shadow, while Shane, with the talented ease and nonchalance of a Chicago working girl, took the key from her purse. Pushing the door open, the flat of her hand pressed to the cold glass, she looked at Pete who leaned back in the dark shadow.

"Come on up." She put her hand high and beckoned, as if she were leading a pack. He swayed forward on his feet away from his leaning position and followed her up the stairs on slow, heavy feet.

"Hi, Rosie!" Shane cried, as she swung the door open to reveal herself and her boy friend standing, as a surprise, at the entrance to their living room.

Rose and her friends sat around the kitchen table which they had taken into the living room. They were playing pinochle. The pink-shaded floor lamp had been pulled to the edge of the game between Charlie and Stella who sat on the Morris chair and the cane-seated rocker. Rose, high on the kitchen stool, was at the head, like a croupier, while Barry, Thure and Jackie sat on kitchen chairs pulled close to the table. Each held a fan of cards. Charlie's hands were fat and yellow with nicotine and oil; Rose's large and knob-boned; Jackie's long red

nails bent back over her finger tips. Barry's hands were dark and stubby like a boy's; Thure's broad and flat of palm with round, hard fingers. Each held the cards as children do, the fingers fluting from the base of the fan with careful width, so that nothing could be seen from one side or the other.

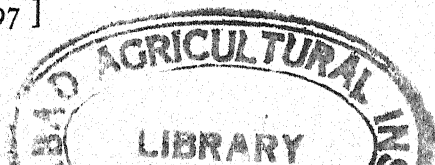
The front door blown wide, as if by a sudden heavy wind, caught them in a moment of intense competition. The face of each held in it a secret and carefully hidden ferocity. Shane and Pete, standing in the door, were not intruders, for the mood of this moment in the competition, rather than being broken by their interruption, touched them and drew them to the game. Quietly they moved to the edge of the light. Thure took a trick and pondered with caution the cards remaining in his hand. The mood of mutual intensity was weakened by his move, and Rose permitted herself to look up at Shane who stood opposite her, watching the cards on the table. Pete stood a little out of the light behind Rose.

"Is this a man or a mouse behind me?" Rose's voice was low, governed by the powerful sway the game held over them, but what she said released Shane from the magic of awe and interest.

Shane laughed. "Well, he's got pants on, don't he?"

"That don't mean nothing." Charlie abandoned the intense silence of the others and talked with Shane and Rose. "Jesus, women wear pants, so they don't mean a thing no more. It's a goddam shame. Pretty soon mice'll be wearing them and then we gotta think of something else to prove we ain't mice. Ain't that right, Pete?"

The position of Pete's tall body, behind Rose, altered so that, although he could think of nothing to say, he had assented to Charlie's words. Again there was a silence, while Thure made



the faster moves which come at the end of the game, when the problem has been solved and the expression of victory, the outcome, pours freely over the winner's face, while he swiftly runs out of the last of the cards.

"That's the end of that one," Thure said, looking closely at the cards that lay face up on the table. Putting his hands on his knees and pushing the chair back, he seemed to be relieved that the game was over.

That guy is so snippy, Shane thought, the way he loves himself.

"I wish I knew . . ." Barry began in the tone of voice that followed careful contemplation of his snub-toed boots. He began again, with an even more deliberately thoughtful tone, "I wish I knew what goes on in your big Swedish head that you can win three games in a row." The obvious impossibility of wondering about such a thing turned the attention of Charlie, Rose and Jackie away from Barry. Yawning, they relaxed their gaze on the ceiling or on the floor. They were not intentionally rude to Barry. They thought he was a nice little guy, but his philosophical, crazy tangents did not interest them.

Thure said nothing. He stretched his arm over the table, back and forth once, collecting the cards, pushed them together evenly in a stack and set them at a square corner of the table.

"Well." When Rose said, well, one quick word, followed by her wide mouth closing tightly, as she waited for silence, she was going to make a darn good suggestion, worth everybody's attention. "Let's top it off with a beer all around."

Barry jumped up from the chair. "Raise your hands," he said. "This is my treat."

No one put up his hands. One could not tell by the expressions on their faces whether they thirsted for it terribly or

didn't care one way or another.

"Jackie?"

"Beer won't hurt my champagne taste, I guess." When she talked she closed her eyes, the way she had seen the customers in the high-class department store do.

"I'm not bothering to ask you, Rose." He turned to Shane. "You?"

"Beer tastes like wood and dandelions," she said.

"Just say yes or no," Barry prompted. "Charlie? Yes." Barry said it before Charlie could nod and make a sloppy drinking sound with his mouth. "Thure?"

The Swede raised his head. "Please."

"Pete?" Pete stirred again, running his hands down the sides of his coat, his eyes lowered. Shane, as she stood on the other side of the table from him, watched him with the deepest baby-blue concern in her eyes, wondering, as if it were a question of life against death, whether he knew what he wanted and how long it would take him to get out the words.

"Sure, you'll have a beer." Barry rescued him, while Shane stammered within herself in sympathy for Pete.

Jackie lovingly looked down at her red nails that curved over the ends of her fingers, the part of her which she had cultivated to be like the movie stars she had seen. "Where did you children go tonight?" she asked.

Shane thought she heard wistful envy in Jackie's voice. This pleased her and made her like Jackie better than she had. With people she felt a little sorry for, she enjoyed being especially nice. After all, Jackie didn't have a swell boy friend like Pete.

"We went to a dance marathon, Jackie. It wasn't much, but we got a kick out of it, didn't we, Pete?" She consulted him as if he were her husband, merely for affirmation, not troubling

him for any personal opinion he might have had. With Jackie's interest to encourage her, she acted as if Pete and she were two people to be envied. With easy composure, she took off her coat and helped Pete with his. She placed hers over the arm of the sofa and his on top of hers, then sat down, leaned back to the hard-stuffed cushion and, crossing one slightly plump leg over the other, delicately pulled the hem of her skirt over her tightly rayon-clad knee. Here in the living room of her own flat, with Pete standing near her, his hands in his pockets, looking at the wall ahead, his eyebrows shyly raised, it seemed to her that she was at last calm, happy and had control of that situation when a girl doesn't know just how she stands with a boy because she's new at the game.

"He sure turned out to be a good dancer." Again Shane talked like a woman speaking of her husband, in the third person, as if they were so used to each other that the easiest way for her to talk about him was to refer to Pete as "him," implying "my husband" or, in this case, "my boy friend."

"We didn't stay very long though. I guess we had enough, didn't we?" Shane grinned at Pete, and his response was no more than a husband would have offered a talkative wife, a slight shrug. As she said these things, she felt that her disinterest in the Dance Marathon made them both seem moderate and sensible, like two middle-aged persons.

Stella and Charlie held hands like young kids. Pete and she didn't have to hold hands. Thure bent forward, his hands clasped between his knees, and there was something purposely alone about him, while Jackie, the girl he should have been kidding with, looked through a magazine. Pete and she were feeling good about their first date and contented with themselves.

"I prefer roller-skating rinks to dance marathons, myself," Rose said, as she carried a tray of different-sized glasses into the room and set it on the table.

"Sometime let's get up a roller-skating party," she suggested.

"Them places are always dreadful crowded," Jackie said.

"Yeah, that's why we left early." Again Shane looked to Pete for affirmation.

Barry came back with bottled beer, the sight of which re-kindled the party. The slight stir he created ruffled, like a breeze blowing a surface current of water, the composure Shane held in her mind and in the expression on her face, while she sat and talked to Jackie. It had felt right to have Pete stand where she could see him from the tail of her eye, see his quiet, submissive form, know that he was listening while she explained to Jackie how they, Pete and she, felt about things. But Jackie stirred when Barry brought in the beer, and Shane realized that these people, gathered in one room, were not altogether interested in what she thought and said.

"Well, if you and I are the only ones who don't drink beer, I guess that makes us different from the mob, don't it?"

She stood up. "What'll we drink, uh?" She appealed to him for help. It would not have surprised her if he had said nothing. And so it was a flooding, warm relief to her that he rose to the occasion and, turning toward her, said, "Just because they . . ." he blushed warmly and his voice cracked, as it had when she had first met him, ". . . they drink beer ain't no reason we got to do anything." His speaking of them as if they were different, or as if he and Shane were no part of their party, made them seem more off and alone, just as they had been aloof from the other spectators at the Dance Marathon.

Jackie, who had been sitting with her hips slanted to one

side of the rocker so that her attention went obliquely to Shane and Pete, swung her neatly thin legs to the other side of the rocker.

"My idea," she spoke slowly, "is to learn some new sport besides dancing and roller skating."

"What else could you do?" Thure had not moved from the chair he sat in when he won three rounds of pinochle in a row. With cool fingers he had been lifting the pack of cards and letting them fall together in a neat pile, making a pleasant slapping sound which only he could hear.

Her head high, but her eyes lowered, Jackie looked toward him sideways. "Oh, like skiing," she said. "I seen how people go off somewheres in the week ends and ski and sit around a fire in cozy little houses afterwards in the right clothes."

"Well," Thure smiled not unkindly. There was a difficulty with making the *W* sound. "The only place near Chicago where there is skiing is Iron Mt., Michigan, 235 miles away. The highest jump in the world. Good skiing, but far away." The pack of cards was untouched now and quietly abandoned. He put his two hands, relaxed, back to his knees and smiled through cold blue eyes.

"Say, don't mention skiing to me," Rose said, and Shane was glad Rose had done something to put Thure in his place. There had been something maddening about the way he and Jackie had talked over her head and Pete's.

"Well, anyhow, don't mention tobogganing to me—same thing, far as I know. Once I had a boy friend . . ." she looked sharply at Charlie before he had a chance to yell, "You had a boy friend?" She went on. "He was a C.C.C. boy, yuh know what I mean? And he had a couple of chums that had a sled, a Flexible Flyer. Well, he took the thing and me to a toboggan

slide out to Elgin. We took off in the Flexie Flyer, and the first thing, he almost kilt us. He lost a tooth, the first landing. You know what got me about that guy was he never knew enough to stop, and I," she put a wise expression on her face and stuck a thumb toward her chestbone, "didn't know how to be tough in them days, so we went down that slide seventy-five times I bet. I got a split lip and I twisted my knee so's it gets me on rainy days, but, by gosh, he couldn't stop! So," her story was over and everyone was laughing, "don't mention no skiing nor C.C.C. boys to me. Besides I know you, honey." She turned to Jackie. "You been reading high-class magazines and seeing them movie stars and going to the show seeing rich kids who don't know how to make an honest dollar, and you seen how slick they look and how skiing is the rage. Don't get took in by that stuff. Don't pay no attention to Thure. He happens to be a Swede, so he knows about skiing because you was born on skis, ain't that right, Thure?" She refilled his glass.

"I was born on skis." He nodded and there was a spark of laughter in his eyes, which he hid, tipping the glass of beer to his mouth. "For a Swede, skiing is not second nature." Thure turned to Barry, "It's first nature." Thure and Barry laughed together.

"Things come to other people so easy." Shane almost said it aloud. Something Irish in her made her want to pick a fight. What about Pete? she wanted to ask lofty Thure. Let Pete tell you a thing or two about California, why don't you? He's been around. Maybe things didn't come easy to Pete like skiing did to Thure. Well, by gosh, she'd make everything as easy for Pete as she could. He wouldn't have to say nothing to her to explain how he felt. For example, he wouldn't never have to ask her, for her to know they would be married. And she'd be

the fighter in the family and make it nice for him. She would fight for a raise if money was what they needed and, after all, money was what everybody needed. Rose could tell her how to do it. Rose knew the ropes in the factory. It wasn't that Pete was dumb. Oh, it wasn't that he couldn't take care of himself and her, too. It was only that with her being on her own, she was learning how to get along in the world, in Chicago, and she could help fight for their rights. Being away from the farm, she was learning plenty, and Pete and she would work together good, because she was learning the ropes for him. A man needed to have his wife know the ropes in the factory these days.

"Hey, you look mad. Don't she look mad, Pete?" Rose was standing in front of Shane, laughing down at her.

"Mad? Me mad? You're nuts, Rose." Shane put her hand to her face and pretended to giggle. Reaching toward the brim of her red hat, she realized, for the first time, that she hadn't taken off her hat, and in her own apartment! "Say!" She looked at Pete who was watching her from the corner of his eyes, a gleam of interest something like a single ray of curiosity going out to her. "Say, why didn't you tell me to take off my hat, Pete?"

"Take it off and make yourself at home. Relax, baby. What you need is a beer." Charlie could tell, too, that Shane had been ill at ease.

"Just because I come from the country, ain't no reason you should tell me how to act in my own jernt." Shane went up to Charlie. Make Pete jealous. Play up to the other fellows. That don't hurt. But no, not too much, don't play up to Charlie too much. "If I wanna beer, I'll help myself. Nobody can make me do nothing," she swept the air with her hand. "I don't wanna." Leering at Charlie, she took off her hat, then turned

to put it on the closet shelf. The moment she faced the dark retreat of the closet, she was embarrassed. What would Pete think of her acting fresh like that with Charlie and saying fresh things? Not only was she getting along lousy with Rose's friends, but also she wasn't so sure at this moment of the boy friend. Right now she wasn't at all sure of Pete. She turned back to the room, ready to face them with fresh determination, but she saw that they were getting ready to leave. The beer was gone. Pete was putting on his coat, the sleeves and shoulders hunched up, listening to something Thure was saying. Whatever Thure was saying had made Pete light up and act natural. For the first time, Shane was seeing Pete listening intently to something that interested him. She went up to them.

"It is the poor quality of the steel," Thure was saying. "That steel is a very poor alloy. That's your trouble."

"Say, do you work in the factory, too?" Shane interrupted him. Thure did not answer her. He turned around to take his coat which Rose was holding for him. He seemed not to have heard Shane.

"I guess I'm supposed to feel squelched." She turned to Pete. "Where does he work?"

"Oil gauges," Pete replied.

There had been something between those two men; something about their work or the factory or steel, that made Pete come to life, smile and look interested.

Fellows just understood each other better than fellows and girls, she guessed, but it was her job now to learn the ropes in the factory as well as the fellows knew them.

"Good night, little Shane," Barry said over his shoulder as he was going out the door. "Don't let bossy Rose get you down. If you ever need someone to help you out, I'm on your side."

Pretending to kick him out, Rose growled, "You're on everybody's side, squirt."

It was a last laugh. Pete who followed Thure still nourished the small fire in his spirit that had been kindled when the Swede talked to him, man to man, about the factory. Shane wasn't going to butt in when Pete enjoyed men's talk.

This was the way women, strong women who work in a factory and are learning the ropes, should take their men, not letting on that they know everything. Shane didn't mind that Pete and Thure had excluded her. She was proud that Pete knew some things she did not understand.

While Pete and Shane stood at the door, waiting for Stella and Charlie to start down the stairs, he put his arm across her back lightly, only for a moment, but it was a sign that he did want to possess her and she would never forget it. The best part of all was that he was a friend of men, not women, yet he would be her boy friend.

"When he put his arm around me, I couldn't of thought of nothing to say, I would of busted out cryin'," Shane told Rose later.

"You Irish can always think of something to say." Rose was sitting on the edge of the bed, letting the shoes drop from her big feet and yawning violently. So wide was the yawn, revealing all the pale pink inside of her mouth and the backs of her strong white teeth, that Shane, looking at her, was fascinated for a moment. Rose was wonderful, full of surprises. She looked away.

"Yeah, I thought up something to say." Her eyes were focused on an invisible object, a point of numb weariness and a vast afterthought of the fun and excitement she had had to-

night. The object was close to her and far away at the same time. Her vision was blurred by it. "I said, 'Thanks for the swell time.'"

"Oh, great!" Rose stood up and began undressing. "Great! That was very clever."

"Listen, Rose." Shane wasn't ready to let it go at that. It was going to be hard to explain to Rose how it was to think you were going to be in love with someone. "With men it's hard."

"With Pete it's hard."

"Yeah, with Pete it's hard. The better they are, the harder it is."

"The harder it is to get 'em, you mean."

"Yeah." Shane's voice swelled. "You might as well be on the up-and-up with your best girl friend. I tell you, Rose, it's hard to get Pete. He's different, y' know."

"Real different, all right." The intonations of Rose's voice were those she used when she had explained to Shane how to fit ball bearings in a cylinder cup. They were automatic, as if she knew all the answers. But Rose couldn't have known all the answers, for she probably never had a boy friend like Pete. That was how Shane figured it.

"I just want you to understand, Rose, that I may not be myself when Pete's around; I may not seem to have that old fighting spirit, but it's there, the old fighting spirit. I'll show you what I can do, Rose. I'll show you Monday. There's plenty a girl can do when she thinks she is going to be in love with some guy. I got to work up my job. I need more money, all the money I can get ahold of. Beginning Monday, I'll show you what a girl in love can do in a factory."

"O.K., you show me Monday." Rose was getting into bed. Shane stood at the dresser brushing her hair. Her yellow bal-

briggan pajamas clung to her breast and bagged at the knees. Feeling that Rose was out of her mood and wanting to get to sleep, Shane dragged her back to consciousness.

"Rose," she said, with the firm yet tentative tone of voice used to waken someone, "Rose, if you was me, how would you ask for a raise?"

Rose flopped on her side, face to the wall, her back to Shane. Looking into the mirror, the brush held still above her head, Shane waited to see if Rose had lost all interest, being sleepy, and was going to leave her alone with her thoughts speaking so loudly in her head that she had to talk.

"I tell you, Red," Rose's voice was muffled with the blanket and with sleep. But she hadn't let Shane down. "I been in a factory for a long time." She pulled out the word *long* with sleep-exaggerated emphasis. "And I'm used to it now. I'm used to letting things just go the way they want to. Frankly, I ain't got no . . ." she emphasized the *no*, "ambition. You don't, when you been working in a factory ever since you was a kid. So I never asked for a raise. I just got 'em once in a while for long-time service and staying in the same layout for years." Her voice groaned with the effort it took to talk. "So don't ask me how to get a raise except if you want to hang around the same line for years, punching in and out and not paying much attention to your job." She breathed the last word *job*, so that the *b* couldn't be heard. Having given out, she fell asleep and left Shane standing alone in her soft, clinging pajamas, wondering how people, swell people like Rose, could stand around and not do anything about making the most of their job. Boy! They would have done something about their job, if they lived on a farm all their life, with nothing but loneliness and the same thing happening or never happening day

after day. And Rose would do something about her job, if she was going to be in love the way Shane was. Rose didn't realize it, but when you were in a big city and had a full-time job and a boy friend, anything was possible. She couldn't think of the word *possible* but she had a feeling there was a word like that, a word she wasn't used to which fitted what she meant. Monday she would show Rose that anything was—that a girl can do anything she wants.

Chapter 9

ONE Saturday in early May, Katie received two hundred dollars from Bert in the mail. It was the first she had heard from him in six months. Putting the check in the pocket of her leather jacket, without saying a word to her mother, she started quickly into town.

The sun, warm on her hair, the breeze coming low off the mud-wet fields, the swinging shadows of the budding trees she passed under, led her and trailed her to the door of the drug-store on the edge of town where she called up her old landlady who got Rose to the phone.

"Shane ain't here. She's out with her steady," Rose said.

Shane's steady, Katie thought, was the Hungarian kid she talked about when she come home last Christmas. "A differ'nt sort of guy, quiet and nice," Shane had said. He wasn't no ordinary boy friend. "When she comes in," Katie said to Rose, "tell her I'm comin' to see her. Tell her I'm comin' to see a lawyer Monday about gettin' a divorce. I'm comin' right away."

"That's swell," Rose said. "We'll be gladda see yuh."

Walking back to the farm, Katie realized that this trip to Chicago would be the hardest; it would be the first time since they moved to the farm last November.

While she dressed, Bobby hung on the bedposts watching her and whining, "Mom, kin I go?" His eyes were sad with disappointment that he couldn't go on the train and wide with admiration for his young mother's prettiness.

"No, you stay here with Grandma. It wouldn't be no fun for you," she kept replying, her mind busy with what she would find in Chicago when she got there. There would be memories striking her with such impact that she might not have the courage to make an appointment with the lawyer. And there would be Shane, whom she hadn't seen since Christmas and who must have changed a lot in the last months, because she had a steady boy friend now.

Once you went through with a thing, stopped thinking about it and did something definite, it wasn't so bad. That was the way she felt, after she had arrived in Chicago and was walking down Madison Avenue, looking in the shop windows before she got on a bus. Her high heels might have struck sparks from the sidewalk with the sharpness of her walk, while her small, well-shaped head, flowered in a large and slack-brimmed white linen hat, turned to look in the reflecting shop windows or shifted to glance down the traffic-choked street or nodded to her feet which hit the pavement with such smart determination. She was glad she had left the kids at home, pleased with herself that she had come alone for the first time since they had moved out of the flat. Yes, once you started to do a thing, it was much easier. That was why her feet didn't lag and why she looked around from under the white linen hat so easily. She rode the bus sitting next to an open window, her elbow resting on the sill and her hand in its white cotton glove holding the trembling brim of the hat. Smiling, she saw nothing of

the city streets, for she was thinking with inner excitement that she had got over it, that seeing where they used to live, talking with Shane, getting a divorce, were not going to be unbearable after all.

When Katie arrived at the apartment, Shane was in the tub. She had hoped that Pete might stay through the afternoon and evening, but he had left early. Until Katie came, it had been the kind of afternoon Shane liked to spend with Pete. It had been natural and homey and left her with something to think about, as she lay weightless in the tub. She had felt like an experienced housewife, as she had washed dishes while Pete sat in the living room. She had taken off her apron, hung it behind the kitchen door, poured some lotion on the palms of her hands, her fingers circulating it quickly over the tender, porous skin. Then she had run her hands under her hair, fluffing it out at the neck, and she had begun to smile, as she walked through the door and found him comfortably stretched in the rocker, his head back and his eyes closed. The line of his lean body started at the top of his head, ran down the back of his neck to the side cut of his chin, stretched down his back to the long, limply extended legs, and made him look so comfortable, so easy. She had leaned over him and kissed him, and time had stood still over her. The waves of everything that had kept her from having Pete to herself receded; the waves of factory noise, of the voices of Rose and Barry. While he lay dozing in the rocker, she had kissed him, roused him and he had groped for her, as if in his sleep. Then she had teased him by moving away, and he became his guarded, quiet self again, smoking a cigarette, looking at her with pale eyes, telling her he had to go, when she explained that her sister was coming.

As Shane lay soaking in the tub, the porcelain cold at the back of her neck, she wished that she could somehow avoid talking to Katie. Katie brought back to her mind the thought of her family's troubles. When she heard her come in the apartment and talk with Rose, she shouted, hi, and said she'd be right out, but still she lay motionless in the tepid water, and wished that her loyalty for Katie would go to sleep in her mind, so that she would not have to recall the godly coldness and everlasting unhappiness of her mother and the drunken, spineless wizardry of her Irish father. Katie was like a ghost reminding her of many things from which she had wanted to escape when she moved to Chicago.

Now that she was so good on the job and Pete was more than a boy friend and she was used to Chicago, she had almost edged the thought of the farm out of her mind. She had just begun to feel that things were almost the way she wanted them, when Katie turned up to tell her what she didn't want to hear. And yet she cared about Katie. Caring about her was what made it hard. Slowly she pulled her knees out of the water and sat up, faintly oppressed by the air that seemed to pour over her.

"You don't look like you been livin' on a farm," she heard Rose saying.

"You know how it is, when you come to town," the older woman replied. "You put on your best and feel like a fool until you walk off the farm into town where everybody else is just as dressed up as you, and you find out there ain't nothin' special about you."

"Yeah, but my idea is you can always tell farm people in the city because they wear clothes that's clean and wore out, and they're sunburned. But that don't go for you." Katie and Rose were getting along so well that Shane felt it was a con-

spiracy. Rose might tell Katie something about Pete, she was afraid, something that might give Katie the wrong idea. She put on a red bathrobe, and her face which shone with being scrubbed by the soap and water seemed childish and round. She was still like a little girl playing dress-up. "Hello, honey," she said to Katie.

"Hello, honey," Katie smiled.

Admiring her sister's picture hat, Shane took it from Katie's head and put it on her own. That was a game they played—pretending to take things away from one another. It probably went back to when Shane was a little girl and would say, "Katie, gimme ten cents?" knowing all the time she couldn't have it. When Katie asked Shane for what, she would reply, "Oh, I don't know," and Katie would say, "No, you can't have the ten cents today," and Shane would press her lips together, pretending to be angry.

"How's Ma?" was the first thing Shane asked, and she asked it quickly, because she was afraid Katie was seeing, with slow, quiet disappointment, how the Morris chair had been moved into the corner, the pink-tasseled lamp had been set next to the couch, and Rose's rocker and the round table had been put in the middle of the room.

"Ma's fine," Katie said easily.

Swiftly Shane changed the subject. "Did you innerduce each other formal? This here is Rose, Katie," Shane said, her face widening with pleasure that these two people she cared so much about were finally meeting.

"I'm gladda meetcha, I'm sure." Rose extended a long arm, and, smiling, looked very directly into Katie's level gray eyes. Rose seemed to have a strangely compassionate sympathy for Katie, as if she were saying, "I'm practically one of the family,

a girl you can trust, so's I know what you been through, but don't mind me."

There was a short silence between the three, while Shane sat in the Morris chair, bending her legs back against her hips and Rose went into the kitchen for a chair which she carried in and was going to place on the other side of the table from Katie. Then she remembered: "Maybe you two . . ." She picked up the chair, as if she were going back into the kitchen with it.

"Stick around," Katie said.

"Yeah, stick around," Shane echoed.

"Well, if you say so," Rose said.

"How goes it on the farm?" Shane asked. Her face was pale and her hair, which hung damply to her shoulders, looked plain brown on the bright red of her robe.

"O.K.," Katie said lightly.

The question about home which Shane had asked was not meant to sound as if she were detached from the farm, but there was more curiosity than concern in her voice, as if she were a different person. She seemed to pretend that she was no relation to the little girl who used to run home barefoot on the dusty road in August, drought-time, to say she thought it was going to rain at last, the little Irish redheaded kid who could drive the horses when she was still lisping.

Katie knew that fresh in Shane's mind was the memory of loneliness on the farm, of seeing her mother overwork, her father being no good. Katie knew how much Shane wanted to forget.

"Things is goin' all right," Katie said. "It's been wet an' warm an' everythin' looks good."

As Katie spoke, Shane thought of blossoming fruit trees,

rows of them running over the gentle slope between the road and the house.

"But we need a man," Katie laughed. "I guess you know why."

It was a reference to the fact that her man was gone now, but she seemed to say it with ease, and Shane was relieved to see that Katie was not pathetic.

"Maybe you could use me on the farm," Rose said. "My pitchfork would be a mean one."

"Don't kid yourself," Shane begged Rose. "Don't even kid about it. Me? I'm through with the farm."

"Shane's through with it," Katie repeated to Rose, "and we ain't blamin' her. When I was her age, my idea was to get away and stay away, too. But after a while, you don't care so much one way or the other and you're just as glad to be back in the old farm routine."

Katie looked as if she were tasting something faintly bitter. Shane saw and waited until she thought it had passed over. Then she asked, "So Bert sent you a lot of money?" Everything she said seemed to sound unkind, but Katie understood, she knew.

Before she answered, Katie looked at Shane, her eyes grieving, not seeing Shane, but seeing a falling away of the past. The vast scene between the time she married Bert and his desertion was crumbling. She hadn't belonged here. For seven years she lived in these rooms. Now the rooms were being emptied of her memories of Bert, their fights, her fear of him sometimes, their rancid disinterest in each other. What haunted her as the wave of unpleasant nostalgia receded, was that if she ever loved him, it was probably now, while she was looking back and seeing old dreams run out of her life, leaving her alone. In a

moment she was drained of the recollections.

"He gives me the money, and I get the divorce."

"Ain't you happy?" Shane pleaded to be reassured that Katie had got over it.

"The charge will be desertion. The kids'll never see him again."

"Those kids always was more yours than his," Shane reasoned.

"That's what he always thought," Katie said.

"How are the kids?" Shane asked with quick interest.

"Ma sees they're clean and that Bobby goes to Sunday school; I see they eat enough; and Pa tells them Irish fish stories. They're O.K. If you notice me talkin' with a brogue," she apologized to Rose, "it's from hearin' my father, I get it."

Rose laughed. She liked Katie.

The three women understood each other better than most women do. Neither Katie nor Rose felt any compulsion to put on airs.

It was twilight now. The gentle heat of young summer was tempered by the eerie half-light that suspended the cool darkness of night and held the gray air calm. Shane stood up and went to the front window. "I been thinkin' about you, Katie." She was going to confess something to Katie, but she spoke it more to the dusk at the window than to her sister. "An' I wanna tell yuh somethin'. You can take it, Katie, an' you make the best out of it. It don't make it no easier for me when I think about you on the farm, playin' second fiddle to Ma and doin' a lot of dirty work. Seein' your kids grow up the way we did, out of touch with things, makes it hard for you, and it makes it hard for me, too, because I feel sorry for you. And when I think about my own troubles—how I still feel out of

place in the big city—I know they ain't nothin' compared to yours, but that didn't help me none when I . . .”

“You're wore out,” Katie comforted her. “You don't needa feel sorry for me. You don't needa feel sorry for nobody else.”

“You gotta lot to tell Katie,” Rose said, standing up and going toward the kitchen. “A lot happened these last months, ain't that right, Shane?”

“My gosh, Rosie,” Shane came away from the window. With her seemed to come the gray dusk. “You'd of thought I been wild or somethin'.”

“There yuh go.” Rose laughed. “Always thinkin' I got somethin' against yuh.”

“Geez, Rosie,” Shane was pleading, “yuh give my sister the wrong idea.”

“You two make funny friends.” Katie's eyes were laughing, but she was soberly relaxed, her legs crossed at the ankles, her arms lying along the elbows of the rocking chair.

“That's just it.” Shane sat down in the Morris chair again with a little bounce. “We get along swell. Course, her and me don't agree. She ain't Irish, which makes it tough on her. An' she ain't as ambitious as me.”

“Tell Katie about your set-to with Frenchie,” Rose called from the kitchen. “Soon's we got settled here, first thing you know she was pushin' up the rate in the factory, fightin' with the boss, squarin' off and leadin' with her right. Give her a couple more months an' she'll raise the roof because she ain't manager of the line.”

Shane was relieved that Rose was trying to get her to talk about the job and not about Pete. “There's never a woman gets to be a manager of a line unless she's tough and worked twenty-five years,” Shane told Katie. “Boy, Katie, you oughta

see what goes on over to the factory. You gotta be rough and tough. You gotta square off to the men, like Rosie says, and you gotta mean hands off. You gotta mean business, stick to your job, ain't that so, Rosie?"

"If you're goin' to be foreman of the whole department . . ."

"Remember when I sent the extra dough home?" Shane seemed suddenly anxious to tell Katie all about it. "Lemme tell you how it happened. It happened a month ago, Katie. By that time I really knew the job—so good I could look around while I was workin', watch the conveyer belts movin' and the expediters draggin' their carts around. I was so used to the factory, I could taste oil and steel in my mouth and I could practically breath gas and it wouldn't of hurt me. Well, this one mornin' I was feelin' good." She clasped her hands together and then rubbed them a little, perhaps because that was something she had seen ambitious, eager, bright people do. "Frenchie come in lookin' terrible an' he takes a look at me and says I musta had a week end out to the farm." Her face was ugly with shadows as she imitated the expression on Michel's face. "His face gets loose-lookin' when he ain't been behavin'. I told him he sure looked like he hadda big head on him, and Frank comes up lookin' so pale an' sick he was pathetic. He says, 'He oughta have a big head today. We went wild last night, him and me.' Frank makes me sick, he tries to be a sinner an' it ain't natcherl to him. 'We hit a bar on the North Side,' he says, 'run by a guy keeps it like a speak-easy. This fellow looks at you through a little window in the door before he lets you in. An' he really gotta know you, or he won't let you in.' Frank looked like he was gonna be sick and his head was wavin' back an' forth so he sat down. An' then he goes

on with his story. 'Michel gets around, so this little guy let's us in. Michel had his own bottle, with his private name on it, and we got drunk. Then the little guy began givin' us this and that and the other to drink. Oh, My God!' I thought he was gonna be sick again. But I didn't pay no attention to him. I was just filin' away on one of them brass weights, while he was lookin' at me to see was I listenin' to him. But I didn't pay no attention, so he got mad an' says, 'We got a girl, a swell little wench, you might say, who didn't wanna give in, after me an' Frenchie showed her a swell time. I don't remember until I waked up,' he says, 'but I musta tore her hair clean outa her head. It was caught in my bracelet here. I seen the hairs in it this mornin'.' He stuck his wrist in front of me and made me look at the bracelet, a little thing he made in the factory. 'We musta had a fight, I guess,' he says, 'becuz I musta tore her hair clean outa her head. But I pinned her down,' he says. 'They can't get away with that. Me and Frenchie don't let 'em off easy.' 'O.K., smart guy,' I says, not payin' no attention, 'That's my bad ear.' He makes me sick the way he talks about women. Well, anyways," she went on, "no matter what happened that morning I was feelin' good. Nothin' could git me down.

"Now the thing about the raise was when I first started the job. Frenchie was showin' me around, tellin' me what was I supposed to do, and he give me a hint or two how to git along in the factory without gittin' in no trouble. He says to me, 'If you ain't already workin' in a factory controlled by a union, you got to do your thinkin' for yerself. Don't try to stir up no trouble an' mind your own business. That's the girl. You'll be a good kid.' So when I was plannin' to git my raise, I decided I wouldn't start no trouble. The only way to git a raise

is by a little talk with Ed, the big boss, but I thought to myself, I'll do it careful, so's Ed won't be comin' around the tach line, checkin' up on things in general, tightenin' up an' puttin' the screws on everybody. The thing was I hadda get permission from Frenchie, because he's our line manager, if I wanted to take time off and see Ed. 'Hey, Frenchie,' I yelled to him, around the middle of the mornin' when everythin' was goin' fine, and he was walkin' up and down the aisle feelin' sorry for hissself because he was so sick from the night before. 'Yeah, whadye want, you cute little mick?' he says, an' I'm on my guard. He puts his arm around me and starts to try something an' I push his arm away so quick, sayin', cut it out."

Her face suddenly tender, Shane looked at Katie, as if she wanted to tell something she knew she shouldn't tell. "Pete was watchin' Michel with me. I seen him. His head was down, but his eyes was lookin' up, an' was he lookin' mad! Course, I never try to get Pete mad, becuz I never know what might happen if he did, he's so strong. But he was mad all right." She looked at Katie to see if she was beginning to catch on about her and Pete, but Katie's head was back and she was relaxed, listening to the story and smiling quietly. "Well, I didn't waste no time tellin' Frenchie what I was plannin' to do, see? I says to him quiet, so's no one could hear, 'I been workin' here for five months. How about it?' Frenchie looked mad right away. 'How about what?' he says. 'In all that time,' I says, quiet and firm, 'I didn't get no raise. Simple? Unerstan'? Get me?' 'Wait a minute,' he says. 'You wait a minute,' I says, still quiet, but I'm beginnin' to scare him. 'I kin be just as tough as you,' I says, 'an' I won't start no trouble, if you just let me take fifteen minutes off to talk to Ed.' 'Listen!' he tried to scare me. 'You ain't goin' to take fifteen minutes off for nothin'.'

"Well, I tell yuh, Katie, I lit into him. 'What are you afraid of, anyways?' I says. 'I ain't nothin' but a woman. A woman don't have no power around here. I won't tell Ed how you come in drunk. I know you take two hours off for lunch, but I won't tell him.' I began to talk loud then. 'I'm nothin' but a poor, dumb kid, a woman off a farm, but I learned plenty these last five months. I won't shoot off my mouth. You ain't the big boss, anyway. Ed's my boss, and Ed don't scare me.' I told him Ed didn't scare me, and I didn't even know Ed then. 'You ain't got nothin' to worry about,' I says, 'so quit lettin' a dumb little girl off a farm scare you.' And I walked down the aisle to the main corridor, and Frenchie yelled somethin' about I wasn't afraid of Ed, maybe, but I better watch out for him. Well, I walked into Ed's office, an' there was nothin' to it. Ed's a swell guy and there wasn't no arguin' with him. He asked me did I have any complaints, and I says, no, except I wanted a raise, and he looked up some stuff and he give me the raise. It beats me what they're all scared of." Suddenly her face was jubilant. "When I come out of Ed's office, I was proud. I wanted to tell them all." She stopped talking for a moment. "But, hell, there's somethin' mean about them other workers."

She took a cigarette from the pocket of her robe. The flame from the match lit up a bitter expression on her face and subsided.

Katie's voice was dreamy in the semi-darkness. "Ye took up smokin'."

"Once in a while," Shane said.

"So you got your raise." Rose was in the kitchen making sandwiches.

"Will yuh ever forgit it, Rose?" Shane called, "an' you said I would haveta wait like you and everybody else had ta for

raises. Well, I didn't wait. I went ahead, an' I got what I was after."

"But doncha see?" There was laughter edging around Rose's voice, "all you did was get a raise a little ahead of time which you woulda got automatic later on."

"Who cares? I wanted it now. I ain't goin' to wait around any longer, while I'm gettin' old and wore out."

"How long you been in the factory?" Rose's voice imitated a case worker.

"Six months, y'r honor."

"How old are ye?"

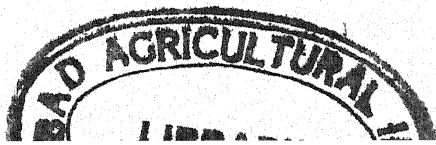
"Nineteen years, y'r honor."

"Keep up the good work."

"Yer makin' fun. They all make fun. I come out of Ed's office feelin' so good and so proud, and I quieted down to work again and pretty soon I thought to myself," her voice went whisper-low, "there's somethin' funny about the people workin' on this line. They're all laughin' behind my back. I can't figure out why. I look around at 'em, an' they're all grinnin' an' like they was whisperin'."

From the kitchen came the sound of Rose laughing.

"I tell yuh, it's true, Rose," Shane called. "One guy comes up to me an' says, 'Hear you had a little talk with Ed this mornin'.' 'Nothin' ain't your own business around here,' I says back to him. 'Don't git sassy,' he says to me, and when he walked down the line, I thought to myself, 'They're jealous.' Oh, well, what do I care what they think," she went on. "Where I come from, unless you pick a real fight, you don't care what other people think about you and say about you." She put out the cigarette and stretched, the wide sleeves of the robe slipping down her bare arms. Katie was so strangely quiet.



It worried her.

"The trouble with them guys is they're lazy, guys like Michel and Frank and that Thure Larsson. That's their trouble. Some of them worked here for years and they belly-ache behind the boss's back about they ain't makin' enough money, an' they cheat on the work, but do they ever do anythin' about gettin' more money? No, not them, the lazy, sneakin' ignorants." She was purposely making herself seem angry to get Katie's mind off whatever bothered her. It seemed good to tell her grievances to her sister, who didn't know as much about it as Rose and was, therefore, more sympathetic.

Rose, making ham sandwiches at the kitchen table, had ceased listening to Shane, but she was thinking about her. There was no reason for her to have gotten mad at the others, she was thinking. The other workers had seen that Shane, the redhead, thought she had done something great by getting a raise, when everybody got a raise once in a while, until they began making \$35 a week. Then the raises stopped coming and you settled down for fifty years working in the same place for the same money, or you got a job somewheres else where a union fixed it you made more money. Rose knew what the others were thinking. She knew they thought Shane was a little girl from the country who just got her first raise and she felt pretty cocky. They had seen it in her face, when she walked back from Ed's office, how she thought she was better than the rest. And when everybody else on the line didn't get up and dance around her or make her manager of the line, unanimous, she got sore. She got red in her pretty baby Irish face, thought the whole world, the whole damn' factory, was against her. Sometimes Rose felt very old and wise. Shane would learn, that kid would, the hard way. Oh, Lord, the

hard way, the way kids from the country with great ideas do. Rose herself was practically born and raised in a factory. Her mother worked in one until she died, and Rose started when she was just a kid. She knew by instinct how to work in a factory. Shane would learn.

"Even the noise the darn machines made was makin' fun at me like voices," Shane was telling Katie. "And the part that makes me mad is I don't know what they was makin' fun at. Talk about fightin' a battle alone, Katie. But then I have to laugh, have to laugh out loud, because it strikes me funny. And now my dream is comin' true. So whaddo I care what them dopes thinks. I got a job in Chicago and I got a raise and I got a boy friend."

Rose had been waiting for Shane to tell Katie about Pete. It wasn't none of her business, but she wanted to tell Katie herself what she thought about Pete. Wishing she could tell Katie all about it, Rose went over in her mind how Pete had acted the day Shane got a raise.

Rose had carried a tray of cylinders to Pete who was putting bolts in them and screwing the bolts to the raw metal.

"I got a nice surprise for you," she had said, placing the tray on his worktable. "More cylinders. Surprise!"

Pete had looked up at her slowly.

Rose had laughed and rested her arm along the top of a pile of empty cases. "Like givin' candy to a baby." She had nodded at the cylinders, then at Pete, who had looked back at his painfully slow, deliberate work. "An' speakin' of givin' candy to a baby, somebody's baby just got a raise."

With vague unconcern, Pete had kept his eyes on the work of his hands. Rose had looked down at the hard curve of his cheekbone above the hollow of his jaw, a hollow so deep that a

fist would fit into it, and she felt a peculiar dislike for him. Not that there was anything wrong with him. After all, he was Shane's boy friend, she guessed, and as far as Rose was concerned he wasn't nothing to her. But if it hadn't been for Shane, she would have said, "I feel like heavin' a cylinder at your jaw or maybe rubbin' dirty grease in your sweet little boy's thin hands."

His lips barely moved. "All a guy hears around this place . . ." he breathed in, swallowed, and looked down, "is how the girls gets things balled up. . . ."

"Well!" Rose pretended to be insulted. The hard set of her mouth made the large bones of her face look more than ever like rock. "Why do you s'pose she asked for that raise?" She had enjoyed the feeling that she was holding him over a cliff. "Maybe you oughta know she got her very special reasons for wanting to make more money . . ." With almost motherly sternness, Rose had looked down at the boy whose skin, face, hands she just didn't like; she didn't know why, she just didn't. She disliked him so that she was ready to forget that Pete was Shane's boy friend. Never the kind who interfered in other people's business, she was teasing Pete, because something weak, pale, tenderly defenseless yet stubborn about him, made her want to hurt him. "Let's keep an eye on Shane," she persisted. "I think she's got some big idea about doing something." Sickened by his lack of response, she started to walk away. "The guy who gets her is lucky," she said, as if it were a warning. If anyone had looked up at Rose and Pete, he would have laughed at the sneer on Rose's face when she said, "The guy who gets her is lucky." There was still a veil, like fog, over his gray eyes, when he glanced at her before leaving to have a smoke in the men's room. That was Pete all over.

While Rose poured their glasses of milk, she wondered what it was Shane saw in him.

"Tell me about this guy," Katie was saying to Shane. "He's a Hungarian, ain't he, the one you told me about at Christmas."

"Oh, him." Shane was lighting another cigarette.

Katie waited to hear.

"Oh, there ain't much to tell. I meant to finish tellin' about what happened the day I got my raise, somethin' that just shows what kin happen in a factory."

Carrying a plate of sandwiches in one hand, Katie came into the room and went to turn on the light.

"Don't turn it on, Rose," Shane said. "It's nice an' still this way. The Windy City's still and nice for a change. Well, as I was sayin', a funny thing happened that afternoon I got my raise. I got up to get a drink of water at the other side of the department, an' I looked down an' seen some spots on the floor, like splashes of ink, only they was blood. Well, I yelled to Frenchie, who was talkin' to some other manager a couple rows over. 'C'mere,' I yelled to him and waved to him. Then I seen Rose was lookin' at me, so I yells, 'Hey, come on over, Rose.' An' old Rose slaps the air with her hand, meanin', quit botherin' me. 'Come here you,' I yelled. Anyways, pretty soon they both come up, Frenchie and Rose, takin' their own sweet time. Frenchie looked annoyed, and before I had a chance to tell him why I called him over, he says to me, 'I don't like you today,' an' he give me a little push which I didn't care for exactly. 'Just watch out,' he says. Rose, who ain't Irish, stepped back, makin' out like Frenchie and me was gonna fight and she din wanna get in the way. 'Shut up a minute,' I says to Frenchie. My gosh, I felt weak. Geez, I was pale. Ain't that right, Rose, an' was I sweatin'! 'Look,' I says, an' I shows 'em the blood an'

I starts followin' the trail the blood made. Frenchie comes over to me an' catches my arm—she indicated the soft upper part of her arm—an' he swung me around. 'Listen,' he says, an' his head was low as a bull's, 'we don't pay no attention to a little accident here or there. You,' he give my arm a flip, 'get back to the job an' earn your dough, earn your stinkin' raise.' But he don't scare Rose. 'Gee, I wonder who it coulda been,' Rose says, lookin' back to where the trail of blood come from. She looked at it close and started following it, while Frenchie just stood starin' at me. An' I stood starin' at him. 'You see how it got there, Rose,' I yelled to her. 'Then come back an' tell me.' I looked at him once more an' walked back to work. I really put him in his place.

"Back on the line some girl told me, 'When there's an accident like that there, the manager on the line of the person bleeding takes care of it.' I wanted to say, 'Well, ain't that nice,' but I kin control myself. When Rose come back from the hospital she says, 'Know who it was? Thure Larsson. A electric drill made a hole that deep in his hand.'" She tapped the knuckle of her index finger. "He's a dumb Swede, some farmer, lives where Rose used to. Every time I see the guy, he says, how come you left the farm, an' I always tell him to wise up. . . . Say, Rose, I meanta ask yuh, how come you went to find out about it, when the manager of the guy's line checks up on accidents?"

"Listen, little Irish." Rose folded her arms. "When you been workin' in a place long as I been, an' you got a pure white record, you kind of do what you feel like doin' once in a while."

Shane laughed. Then, while they were quiet for a moment before they started eating the sandwiches, she thought in one sharp moment of an electric drill slipping in a man's hand, of

his face, holding in it sudden quiet but violent pain. Men didn't cry and carry on when they got hurt; they just maybe held the hand to keep the blood from coming out of it too fast, only some blood dripped through on the floor, when they walked to the hospital. Then they came out of the hospital, pale and weak, but they were still manly about it. If Pete had it happen to him, she would go right with him to the hospital. She would love to bandage it. If it was Pete it happened to, he would take the pain and never let on, but she would know it was a terrible thing to have happen. A sharp silver thread of pain startled her at the thought of a wound deep in Pete's hand.

"What was funny," Rose told Katie, "was seein' Shane so worried, and then Thure and Frenchie come walkin' down the main aisle, with Thure's hand all bandaged, but him not even noticin' or actin' like anythin' happened. Frenchie was tellin' Thure how excited the little Irish mick got, an' the Swede was laughin' the way I never seen him before. It really wasn't much of an accident."

"O.K., it wasn't much of an accident," Shane said. "Is there somethin' wrong with me or somethin' that seein' blood makes me pale and makes me worry even about some dumb Swede?"

"You're wore out," Rose said. "She goes out with Pete every Friday night," she told Katie, "an' they don't come home until morning."

"Quit talkin' that way, Rose." Shane's voice was sharp-edged. Then it lowered until the breath of her throat almost smothered the sounds into a whisper. "Katie'll get the wrong idea."

Ghostly gray dusk buzzed softly in the air and a shadow swarming with tiny brilliants went across her eyes, as if she had been lying down and suddenly jumped up, losing her head

and becoming dizzy. It must have been the thought of blood and of Pete's maybe getting in an accident some time, that did that to her, made her feel so confused.

"I ain't gettin' no wrong idea," Katie said. "I been young and had my fun, too." The look of youth emerged from her eyes and from the shadows of her talking, laughing face.

"You don't know what I mean," Shane said, holding the collar of her robe close around her throat as if she were cold. "I can't explain. He's differ'nt."

"He's differ'nt, all right," Rose said. "He ain't never said two words to me. He acts like he's either lazy or he's scared to death. Maybe he acts more natcherl when he's alone with you."

"No, he don't act more natcherl when he's with me," Shane said, turning proudly to Rose. "He don't say much, but I'm sure of him, see?"

"Sure. You keep at him," Katie said, smiling at Shane with happy envy.

"Oh, Katie, it ain't that way! He ain't the kind makes plans. He's too shy for that." They couldn't understand. They didn't know how clean he smelled at the collar of his shirt and the cool side of his cheek, how he laughed sometimes and other times looked sad when she talked about buying a vacuum cleaner and a set of dishes, how gentle and sure his hands were, how he made her feel quiet and calm outside and excited inside. "We ain't announcin' nothin' yet," Shane said. Katie's and Rose's laughter collided in her mind against the protective thoughts she had for Pete. Shane stood up. "Go ahead an' think what you wanna think," she said. "I'm goin' to bed. I'm workin' tomorrow." A desire for revenge made her voice sound childish. "You two have a good time tomorrow, an' the next

day you see your lawyer, Katie. Meantime, I'm makin' money, myself."

"On the sabbath?" Rose mocked her in fun.

"Thure Larsson come to me an' asked me to work in oil gauges," Shane retorted. "I figure if that dumb Swede can do it, I can put in some extra hours there, too, for time an' a half."

"Yuh better dress cool!" Rose said, "an' yuh better tell Frenchie. You can't work overtime. You're a woman."

"Lissen, you can't tell me what to do an' what not to do."

"Go to bed. Let's take in a show," Rose said to Katie, winking broadly.

Chapter 10

THE next day was hot. Early in the morning, while Rose and Katie were still sleeping, Shane took a cool bath and put on a dress she had saved for this day, in case it was warm and spring-like again. The dress was striped yellow and pink, and she had put starch in it the last time she washed it. It was sleeveless and had a low, square-cut neckline, so there was plenty of ventilation. She made a good lunch that day, too, cut off the bread crusts and wrapped a peach in waxed paper. To be working on Sunday made her feel daring, made her feel she was putting one over on Katie and Rose and her mother, too. On the farm, no matter what, they never worked Sundays, except for taking care of the animals. It didn't seem right to go to work on Sundays when most people stayed away from the factory but, then, it was because she loved strange, quiet Pete that she wanted to make the money to buy things they would be using together some day.

When most of the workers were away, the factory was like a different place. As Shane walked along its high brick wall to the iron gate of the entrance, she noticed that it was like an empty theater, or a school when the kids have gone home. Without all the other assemblers crowding its stairway, she could see, for the first time, how wide the corridors were, how

high the ceilings, and how many passageways and large doors led from one big room to the next. She saw how much machinery was needed to furnish a factory, how many boxes and cables, work benches and cranelike things hanging from the ceiling, and how many desks. It was silent and dead today. Only a few wheezes and palpitations from the machinery kept the place alive.

Slowly, for she was early, she walked down the wide corridor that led to her everyday line. Like a ghost-walker, she returned to the scene of her former haunts, as if it were the last time she was looking at the old line, when, with all the others, she would be back on the job tomorrow. Seeing the tach line abandoned made her feel sad. I must be nuts, she thought, but nevertheless, she had to stand for a minute and look at her own work desk, at Rose's, and Pete's. She walked on, following the directions Thure had given her, when he asked her if she could work Sunday in oil gauges. She went back through a huge stock room to a part of the factory which was very warm and dark, because there were no windows nearby. A big, middle-aged man sat at a desk at the end of the line, bouncing a pencil off the back of his hand into a small metal tray. "You Thure Larsson's friend?" he asked, when she walked up to him.

"I'm the new kid to help out on the line," she said a little haughtily.

"That's fine," he smiled and stretched, his barrel chest straining the seams of his blue work shirt. "Ever done this work before?" he asked.

She shook her head, and he said, "Well, it ain't hard. You can do it, but it'll be hot." Smiling, he stretched his neck to look around and see who had come to work. "Guess there

won't be more'n two, three of you down there," he said. Then he got up and turned on the strong, blue-white tube lights above the troughs, some of which were filled with hot oil and some with cold water. The gauges were hung in the oil, then dipped in the water, then cleaned.

The big man who seemed to be the boss in this part of the factory explained the work to Shane. It would be easy enough for her to pick it up and learn it. Even if the work was unfamiliar, she would be able to keep up the rate. It would be fun to try for one day, anyway.

"That what you gonna wear?" He looked down at her clean, starched dress.

"Sure, why not?" Shane's voice rose, as if to say, what else should she wear? She'd been working in a factory long enough to see what they all wore, bud. He laughed and took a clean white handkerchief from his pocket, which he tied loosely around his throat.

"Gonna be hot," he warned.

No bells rang on Sunday, but the people who were working for time and a half knew exactly when to step on to the line. Thure was the first to come from the small group of workers who sat together in a corner of the room near the windows.

"Hello," he said. It must have been his Swedish accent that made hello sound like a question.

"Hi!" She was finding a place to put her purse and lunch. When she looked up, Thure was standing on the other side of the trough, opposite her, holding out a large piece of clean cloth.

"What's that for?" she asked dumbly.

"Tie it around you," he advised and shook the cloth with

gentle impatience. Had he been more like Shane, he would have said, "I can't stand here all day, holding this out for you."

"Aw, I don't need that." She refused it.

A tired looking, older woman joined them. She had a large rag tied around her waist.

"Just the three of us." Her mouth barely moved when she talked. "Just us—that's all—and a million oil gauges. Oh, My God!" She said it softly and contemptuously.

"Well, it ain't my fault," Shane laughed, tears coming into her eyes, for she felt oily around her eyes, and that always made the tears come. The woman sounded as if she were blaming someone. Her face, when she heard Shane laughing, showed more intense weariness. "I gotta go slow today, Thure." Her eyes widened, as she pleaded with the Swede who was lining up gauges on the racks.

"Don't complain, Ida," he said gently.

"You mean you work fast on this line?" Shane's voice rose with unbelief. "You mean you don't hold back?"

Thure looked at her as if he did not understand what she was saying.

"If I had my way," Thure looked at Ida, his heavy blond brows lowered to his gray eyes, "you wouldn't be here at all." He knew that Ida was one of the women who didn't have to work, whose husbands made good wages and so did their children, but they were martyrs for money.

Ida tried to scowl at Thure, but was so weary that nothing happened to her fat old face but a deepening of the wrinkles around her mouth and nose.

"Who are you to say a thing like that?" Shane confronted Thure.

"Ida knows what I mean," he said. He spoke with a patronage and gentleness, neither of which she understood. So she ignored him.

The three of them began working and Shane discovered it was not the kind of work for talking. As quickly as Thure dipped the gauges in the oil and water and hung them on the racks, Shane wiped the dials of the gauges clean and put them back on the racks, while Ida dipped a small brush in white paint and put the finishing touches on the numbers of the dials. The room was warm with the heat of premature summer that preyed on the city, with the glare from the blue-white tube lights that stretched over the troughs and with the oil that was at boiling temperature.

Oil and water ran from Shane's elbow down her arm to her wrists. She was working as hard as she could, but she did not mind, for there was something about working hard and fast that made her forget the heat and the sliding rivulets of oil on her arms. Occasionally, Shane caught up with Thure and had to wait for him. Pretending to be impatient, she put her hands on her hips and relaxed as if she had been waiting for fifteen minutes. By lunch time, it was a joke, for Thure would suddenly gang up on her, when she pretended to have been waiting, and would overload her supply of gauges.

But when they knocked off for lunch, the joke was over. Shane left Thure and the oil gauges and the strange part of the factory to go back to the familiar place where she ate lunch with Jackie, Stella, Lillian and Rose. She did not miss her cronies though, for when she finally got to the radio parts line, and the row of north windows, she was trembling with exhaustion and heat, and was relieved to be alone. She stood at an open window, holding her thick hair up off her perspiring

neck. The air that crept upon the new green of a tree below the window was warm, and it was drying, so that the fine hair at the nape of her neck curled away from her skin.

In the washroom which was, for once, not crowded, she scrubbed her hands and arms and wiped them with paper towels which left wet crumbs on her glazed, clean skin. With three bobby pins she fastened the heavy skeins of her hair to the top of her head. Then she left the washroom and went to the bubbler, which she let run a long time before drinking from it. After drinking more than enough water to satisfy her, she slowly moved her face in the cold jet, across her forehead, over each eyelid and cheek and down her chin, from which the water dripped when she straightened up and walked wearily back to the open window, where she let the warm air crawl over and dry her face. Since lunch time had begun, she had trembled inside with every breath she took. The uncontrollable quaking of the heart that comes when one relaxes after working hard, shook her so that her mind was doing silly things. She stared at the tree beneath the window until it loomed large, then she stared at a patch of rust in the iron grillwork of the window, until it, too, grew big. Silly thoughts jumped at her, too; thoughts like, "I been workin' hard, real hard. Nobody knows how hard I been workin'. It's a secret. My secret. Pete's secret. No one else'll ever know how hard I been workin'." Thure had been working hard, too, but not many of the people she had seen in the factory worked the way they had that morning. And the thing she liked about that morning's work, although she did not consciously know it, was that being hot, having a messy job, working to keep up to the rate and working with someone who worked just as hard as she did, made her feel the use of all her strength, the strength

of a farm woman. Her feeling that the other workers were unfair and jealous, her being a young kid off a farm, her heart soreness that people didn't understand Pete and her, all the torments of her stubborn Irish life had to get out of the way when she cleaned oil gauges.

She was cooler now and had got over trembling, but only a few minutes remained for her to eat. There was just time to down the sandwich. She had to save the peach for later.

When she went back to the line, Thure said in a low aside, "I bet you that peach you can't keep up with me this afternoon."

"I don't usually bet," Shane said, "but this is so easy, I'll take you up on it."

"Don't tire yourself," he said over his shoulder, as he began swinging the gauges onto the line. She laughed.

Looking at her evenly, he said again, "Don't tire yourself. It isn't good for women."

How did he know what was good for women?

Soon, all the time and care she had spent scrubbing her hands and arms and pinning her hair up was wrecked by the sloshing and running of oil over her warm flesh. Strands of her hair hung down limply against her perspiring neck and cheeks. From time to time, Thure looked up to see how she was coming along. He seemed to be laughing to himself, as he rushed to push the rate ahead, while Shane worked with disinterested, white-faced fury to keep up with him.

When the time was up—they worked just three hours Sunday afternoons—he laughed out loud, a strangely easy laugh from a reticent Swede. With the flat of his arm, a muscular arm with dilated veins, he wiped his face which was ruddy with heat. He looked like a man who was used to hard work,

lifting railroad ties or carrying heavy logs. "Ya," he said, "you're pretty good. Look." He pointed at Ida. "There's the bot-tle neck." She sat wearily finishing the numbers on a gauge dial. Around her ranged hundreds of gauges which Shane and Thure had put through in record time.

Although she was so winded that her breath tremulously shook her breasts and shoulders, Shane asked him in clearly grim tones, "O.K., who won?"

Shrugging his heavy shoulders, he said. "Just look and see." The same laugh ran through his words. "But you are very good considering you never tried this work before."

She was ashamed of how proud that made her feel. Only a half-dozen racks of gauges were waiting to be cleaned. She had finished the rest.

"You should work this hard on a farm where your cheeks will get pink with the sun." He looked at her with gentle amusement. "Why did you leave the farm?"

"Oh, come on, whadye know about American farms?"

He laughed and looked at the peach which Shane had put on a shelf over one of the cold water troughs. He put out his hand, rust-colored from handling the metal gauges. "Might as well divide it," he said, picking it up.

"Don't touch it with your dirty hands," Shane yelled. His quizzical look made her ashamed of her outburst. "What I mean is," she blushed, "let's wash our hands first."

"No," he said quietly, "we eat it now while we're hot and thirsty. A little oil never hurt." He spoke to her softly, in a Swede's singing way, as if he were reasoning with a child. "You divide it." He handed the peach to her, then the wax paper in which it had lain. First she plunged her hands in the icy water to drive the oil from them. Then, putting the paper over the

peach, she grasped it with both her hands, twisted it with quick pressure, handed him the half that held the red-veined stone and kept the other half with the paper around it.

He had watched her closely. There was something about her hands, the high round cheeks, or perhaps the eyes, that made nostalgia, like a gentle wind, pass over his mind. She brought to him remembrance of his cousin. In the brief moment he watched her, he was drawn away and far back to the longest night of the winter, when he had been nine years old. The Larssons were visiting their rich grandmother in her manor house in Dalarne. Thure slept with his older brother, Oscar, named after the king, in a large room of the old *Winterstuga*. In the morning before dawn, their bedroom door was opened, and they were gently awakened by light that came, soft and wavering, through the door and spread over the walls and finally reached over their bed. It was their cousin, Selma, the oldest granddaughter of the Larsson family. On her head was a wooden crown with tall candles on it, that sent the now bright light streaming around her pretty face and over the soft white silk of her nightgown. She carried a tray of hot coffee and coffee bread that she put on the knees of the sleepy, wondering boys. Thure could remember the feeling of it. It was so strong in him that he could forget everything else when he thought of it. She had placed a candle at the foot of the bed and gone out, leaving them to lean close over the tray, dipping the cake in the coffee [that tasted so good] and murmuring over it together. When they had finished, they put the tray on the bedside table and snuggled down in the warm covers again. Then he, sleepy little boy, thought and dreamed of how wonderfully beautiful his cousin had been, as she had walked slowly up to their bed, the light from the flaming candles shining

over her high round cheeks and touching glints in her blond eyelashes. He remembered that Selma had looked like an angel; she was so glowing and white in the silk robe and candlelight, but when she had put the tray on their knees, careful not to spill the coffee, Thure had looked at her hands grasping the tray handles, and then he had known it was a real Selma, because of her strong fingers, firm and pink, as if she had washed them in ice-cold water. That was it, maybe—Shane's hands, the high round cheeks, or perhaps the eyes—that reminded him of his cousin as she was that *Nucia* morning. It did not please him to remember, for it made him feel lonely.

"I eat by the window," he said to Shane. She followed him down a long, narrow passageway to a single window that overlooked the parking lot. It was an east window through which came a faint breeze from the lake. Leaning side by side over the sill, they ate the peach in silence. Thure, who was long-waisted, could lean far enough out the window to keep the bitter-sweet juice from dripping on his face. Shane held her hand at her chin, as she slowly ate the wet-running fruit. Throwing the stone which he had drawn dry far into the haze of the hot spring afternoon, Thure took a deep breath that expanded his chest so that he seemed to press against Shane.

"What'sa matter?" Shane's teeth were working in the firm pulp of the peach, "ain't you got room to breath in?" She did not say it unkindly. With someone she didn't feel one way or the other about, on neutral ground, what might have sounded like fresh sarcasm was easy matter-of-factness. She moved a little to the side to give him more room at the window.

"No, I'm used to the country," he said.

Pleasantly indifferent, they stood looking out to the jigsaw horizon of black, wooden slum houses. Finally Shane mur-

mured, "That's all. There ain't no more." Languidly she took her arms from the window sill, uncrossed her legs and straightened up.

Thure, who seemed to be wandering off like a dreamer into the warm air, turned his head to look at her over his shoulder. The oil and evenly absorbed dirt and rust on their faces made their eyes look deep set in their skulls. Chains of inlaid dust lined the depression between their mouths and chins. Thure's strong, wide neck looked scorched. Shane's hair lay moist on the top of her head and dangled limply around her cheeks, a few strands sliding over her face when she glanced down at her dress which had become an oil skin. She looked up at Thure, a string of hair between her eyes making her seem a little cross-eyed. Too tired to laugh at how funny they looked, she turned around and walked slowly, deliberately back to the line where she had left her purse, which she picked up and put between her waist and her richly dirty arm. As she walked, she felt her dress slap against her legs like thin, wet animal skin. At the time clock, she punched her card and looked with grim-faced satisfaction at the time printed next to Sunday. When she got home she was going to sit down and figure out how much money she had made this week, and then she would sit and wish Pete would come over.

As she walked out of the factory, she saw her bus coming down the block, but she did not run, because she couldn't. The warm air that blew along the gutter up to her made her feel helplessly tired and slackened her body, so that at the bus stop she had to lean against the unyielding cement of a lamp post.

While she waited, she heard the clap of footsteps on a deserted city street. It was Thure who had washed himself clean and changed his clothes. "Did we miss one?" he asked, taking a

watch with a hunter's case from the inside pocket of his clean gray wash suit, and winding it.

"Yeah," she said. "Who cares?"

When the bus came, Thure let Shane get aboard first and followed her to an empty seat. "I'll stand," she said. He seemed reluctant, but he sat down. She slipped her oily hand over the metal handle at the corner of the seat, and rode the swaying, jerking bus. She didn't want to sit down because she might get oil and grime on his suit.

Shane stooped to see through the window where they were.

"One more block for you," Thure said in a low voice, as if he wanted to help her be as inconspicuous as possible so that no one would notice her straggly hair, copper-dirty face and wet-looking dress.

"Thanks, pal," she answered in an equally low tone.

When Shane walked into the apartment, she stood silent for a moment, her eyes pale in the darkness of her face. Rose, who had been reading the paper, looked at her dumbly over the rotogravure section which slowly dropped in her lap. "What happened?" she asked, her voice hushed.

Katie came into the room then and stood, transfixed, at the sight of her sister.

"Oil gauges," Shane said, going over to a corner of the room where she dropped her purse on the floor. "I worked in oil gauges."

Spellbound they watched her unbutton her dress down the front and let it slip off her to the floor.

"I guess the next time you feel like working overtime, you won't tell nobody about it," Katie said carefully.

In her slip which was so oiled that it was transparent, Shane

sat down on the floor and slowly untied her shoes. Her fingers worked so paralytically with the shoe laces, that they seemed to be stiff with cold rather than heat. "No, I wished I worked there all the time." She pushed the shoes from her feet and peeled off her socks.

"You mean you liked it?" Rose was half standing now, she was so fascinated.

"It wasn't bad." Stripped, Shane walked meekly past them into the bathroom.

"If Frenchie don't know about her workin' on Sunday, she might not catch hell," Shane heard Rose tell Katie.

"That ain't the way Shane is," Katie said. "She goes around lookin' for trouble."

Shane locked the bathroom door and turned on the light. When she faced herself in the mirror, she laughed out loud. Then, as she looked down into the white porcelain bowl where the water covered her rust-dirty hands, she thought how good Katie was to be able to kid her; how rotten Katie must have felt inside, like rotten wood, when she had nothing to go home to but the road from the station to the farm. Katie had nothing to think about but seeing the lawyer and getting the divorce that made the last seven years into waste. Still Katie laughed, as if she felt good, and Shane wished she did not know about her sister's troubles.

After they had gone to bed that night, Shane got up and went into the living room to check on the lock of the front door. Katie lay on the couch, the white sheet pale around her dark head.

"Feel O.K.?" Shane asked.

"I don't mind." Katie's sleepy laugh sounded of impatience and kindness. "You go back to bed; you must be wore out."

The next morning Rose and Shane got to work early. As usual, Shane left Rose and went toward the windows where she sometimes met Pete if he came early. She went to the one where she had stood cooling off yesterday. Unchanged, still there, as if held over in her mind from yesterday, was the tree through whose branches the warm breeze played. There was the same patch of rust, like a sore, in the iron grillwork of the window that she had stared at yesterday as if she were paralyzed. Leaning her arms on the window ledge, she looked up at the pale morning sky that washed over Chicago. It was a fair day. She wished that Pete would surprise her in the gentle way of his silence, walk over to her side and look her over to see what dress she wore. It was a pretty cute dress with purple flowers, small budding ones and full-blown ones on a white background, and she had tied a purple ribbon through her dark red hair.

"Always hiding on me. I been looking for you." It was Michel, his voice husky and expressionless from having just got up to haul himself to work.

Since Shane had broken the rate on the tachometer line, Michel had not edged up to her with his silly, flickering words, 'cute little mick,' 'cute little baby,' and she hadn't been disgusted with him for some time. As long as a guy like Michel kept his distance, he did not bother her one way or another.

"Leave me be in peace, can't yuh," she said pleasantly, not turning around but leaning farther out the window.

"Follow me, you mick," he answered.

In the middle of a yawn, she turned and frowned at him, pretending to be annoyed.

"Come here," he threatened.

Thinking he was teasing her, she went up to him and threatened back in his tone of voice, "Whadye want?" She could snarl the way he did.

"Never mind what I want." He put his hand on her shoulder, then around to the back of her neck under her hair. Before she could jerk away, he had taken his hand off. "You're in a little trouble," he said.

"Lead me to it." She could pretend to be tough, too.

"O.K.," he said, "you're askin' for it, baby."

She followed him in silence down one aisle and then another until she realized they were heading for the oil-gauge line.

"Now you're gettin' in my territory," she said to him, as they walked between the crates of a stock room into the interior of the department where they had to use blue lights, because there was no daylight. "I worked here yesterday."

When they reached the desk where Shane had reported yesterday, he turned around, looked at her directly, then eyed her sideways. "Either you're so innocent you're dumb," he said with calculation, his eyebrows up, then going on softly, "or you're really trying to screw things up around here."

"Whadye mean?" She was aware again of the familiar intricate misunderstandings of everyday work in a large factory. In just one day of working as hard and fast as she wanted, while the rest of the place was quiet, she had forgotten what troubles she could have from working with a lot of sore-minded people.

"Maybe you really are dumb," he said. "Now take me; I'm not so dumb."

"What's the matter?" she shouted. Already her calm feeling

was lost in the too familiar semi-panic that came when Michel and other workers, too, were against her.

"Where's that guy, Thure?" Michel turned around. Thure had just come in and was walking in his heavy, yet boyish, way to the troughs where the gauges were cleaned. Hearing Michel, he walked up and slowly looked them over, the blond lashes white around his eyes which stared at them impartially, but with curiosity.

"This kid worked on your line Sunday," Michel held up Shane's time card, shaking it.

"Say, what're you doing with that?" Shane interrupted, anger dawning on her. "What right you got to take my card that's worth all my pay to me? You ain't gotta right."

"We got an order to fill in our line." Michel still talked to Thure, as if to accuse him of something, while Shane was mad at both men, because they both probably knew what was the matter, while she did not. She had to stand there listening, with no argument, because she wasn't wise to the situation.

"You ain't supposed to touch nobody else's card," she said sharply.

"There's a little rule," Michel turned to Shane, "that you can't work more than so many hours a week, mick. There's also a little rule that when you work on line 21," he pointed to the number that was opposite her name on the card, "you're workin' for me." He tapped his shirt front with the tips of his fingers. "Swede, here, knows our system around here, so I gotta feeling you're the one's to blame."

Now the two men stood looking at her, two against one, Michel surly, the ugliness of his scorn spreading into the dark around his eyes, while Thure stared at her impersonally, as if he had never before seen her.

"Regardless of what anyone else says, you're workin' for me, and I'm supposed to know when you work and where you work, and you're supposed to come to me, see?"

"I'm working for this factory," Shane began, "and Ed's my boss."

"Ed ain't your boss; I'm your boss, and you screw things up, mick."

"If I want to work on Sundays, I gotta right . . ."

"You ain't gotta right," he mocked her. "How are we going to get production through with you working over here Sundays?"

"Thure told me I could work here . . ."

"I didn't tell you to work here." Thure's voice was so gentlemanly that she hated it. "I tell her to work on the farm, not here," Thure said.

"You joker." She could think of nothing more insulting to call the Swede, because she was in a hurry to settle the argument with Michel. "He tells me he needs someone to work in oil gauges, an' I gotta perfect right . . ."

Michel gasped heavily, then gave up. "What we gonna do with this kid?" he consulted Thure.

Was he fooling, Shane wondered, or was she really in dutch. "You ain't my . . ." She was going to say, boss, but that had been said enough. "You ain't my father." She was unhappy. Around her eyes and on her upper lip she was hot.

"I been workin' here a long time, but I never saw anyone," he paused for effect, "who could get into more trouble than you, mick."

Why was he making such a fuss about it, Shane wondered. The bell had rung. The workers and the power of the machines had set the lines in motion; the outcry of heavy factory gear

shot through the air. The expediters were roving from one line to the next and the managers were checking on output. They coursed around the machinists and technicians and draftsmen and thousands of assemblers going about their work, while Thure and Shane and Michel stood staring at one another. Some of the girls who were working on the oil-gauge line looked up at her, with what Shane thought was an accusation, like Michel's. Michel talked about the production they had to get through on the tach line, and here he stood bawling her out, accusing her of being a troublemaker and grimly staring at her.

"Got to get going, Frenchie," Thure released himself from the deadlock.

It maddened her to watch him walk away; to see his back, broad and straight in the limp cool material of his blue work shirt, his bare arms, full-fleshed and muscular, swinging at his sides, relaxed and easy. He had left her flat, as if they hadn't worked hard together yesterday, getting a kick out of each other, helping each other catch up to the rate; as if they hadn't eaten that peach together at the window, like a couple of hot, dirty slaves sneaking a little relief. And there had been the ride home on the bus; she reeking and fuming of oil and he, neat and clean and placid, sitting below where she stood. And she had stood because she wouldn't sit next to him and risk dirtying his suit. Now he had looked at her as if she were so much air, and after he had heard Frenchie give her hell, he just walked away, slow and unconcerned, as if he were going back to the line after a smoke.

"O.K., back to work," Frenchie said. You'd think it was her idea that they stand there arguing for no reason at all that she could see.

Shane preceded him down the aisle. Before they passed Thure, Shane stopped and tapped the Swede on the back. Slowly, questioningly, he turned around.

"What do you think I am, Shanty Irish?" she blazed at him and proudly turned away.

As she walked away from Thure, she thought about Pete who sat on the tach line, his thin, pale hands working so decently and quietly with the small pieces of metal. Pete was a good boy, clean and gentle, strangely silent, who never got in trouble or got anybody else in trouble.

Michel who walked close behind her, laughing, stepped to her side and slipped his arm around her waist. "Let's be pals," he said.

She paid no attention to him.

"Aw, come on," he said. "Let's change the subject. You going to Stella and Charlie's wedding next week?" he asked. "O.K., if you won't talk, babe. I was only counting on seeing you at Stella and Charlie's wedding next week," he teased and left her, walking toward the end of the line where Frank Hendler worked.

There was one longing in her, and that was to see Pete. She stopped at his side. He looked up at her, seeing the pretty purple-and-white dress on her, and she was suddenly relieved. This was the guy for her. "Charlie and Stella gettin' married?" she asked.

"How should I know?" He slowly rolled a screw driver between the palms of his hands, and looked at her dress.

"Oh, Frenchie was sayin' . . . Well, let's go together if they are." She wanted to put her hands on his cheeks.

"Depends on when it is," he smiled. His teeth and lips and skin were all the same pale color. He needed to be out in the

sunshine and the wind.

"I'll find out," she reassured him, "and we'll make a big night of it."

Something to look forward to, that's what you had to have, and Pete was so slow about comin' around to see her, so shy, that she was always the one who had to make the plans.

But first she had to work. After lining up her tools, she slowly counted the number of shafts and weights and put them in the trays that came off the conveyer belt. Then she began polishing the slim, cylinder-shaped shafts. Usually she had an eye on the one she would pick up next while she nimbly rubbed the one in her hand with the chamois cloth. They were polished and put back in the tray, one after another, as quickly as she could take them up and replace them. But she had had a fight with Michel and she didn't yet know what would happen to her because she had worked Sunday on another line. Nor was she sure that the date she was seeking with Pete would come through. So the work of her hands was tedious.

When she finished the last shaft in the case at her side, she placed it on the counter of the line table and watched it roll away, then stop. It was maddeningly arbitrary. Squashing the chamois cloth in her hand, she turned and looked toward the head of the line at Stella, who was cleaning and arranging tachometer skeletons on trays. Her face was flatly relaxed. With grim disinterest, she watched her own hands mechanically grip and release the pieces of metal. "Stell," Shane cried above the noise that separated them. "Stell, I hear yuh gettin' married."

Her hands moving with unaltered rhythm over the tach parts, Stella looked up and, her cheeks widening and her eyes half-closed, she smiled.

"When yuh gettin' married, Stell?" The effort to shout so

loudly seemed to bring a straining lump to Shane's throat.

Stella's mouth formed the words, week from Wednesday.

At least that was definite, Shane thought, as she started a new tray. She and Pete would go to the wedding together.

When her attention turned in to her own thoughts, the factory racket died down like a narrowing wind, until someone stopped at her side and the riot of sound rose again.

Thure waited to say something to her. He stood straight, as if at attention, and did not interrupt until she had seemed to come to a good stopping place.

"I don't think you are Shanty Irish," he said, and his face, which always looked windburned, altered, a smile drawing fine lines at the corners of his ice-blue eyes. "Look," he said.

Standing up, she cut him short. "You look! I don't know who you are, but you sure think you're fine."

The color was high over the short bones of his cheeks. "You should know what happens when you work with me on Sunday." He held off her anger.

"O.K., you tell me." She pretended that she didn't need to know, but she wanted him to explain.

While he told her that she could work just forty-four hours a week, with time and a half on Saturday, and that she would have to take a day off to make up for Sunday's work, Michel, who was talking with Frank Hendler, looked over toward them.

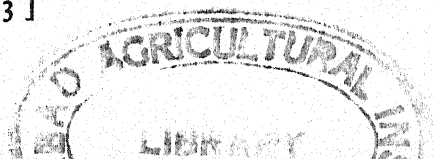
"My God, I got those two excited over nothing," Michel laughed with a cigarette cough, which made his face look crumpled up until his breath came to him, and he said, "She's ripe just about now." He tapped Frank's shoulder. "Don't forget our little pact, son, and I get my cut, too."

When Thure walked by, Frank put out his hand to stop

him. "Just about ripe, ain't she, Swede?" Frank cried. He held his hand still outstretched in a frozen attitude of greeting, as he grinned up at the smiling Swede. Putting his hands in his pockets, Thure looked down at the floor, as if he were deeply considering what Frank had said. Then he pointed at Frank's hand which trembled, and he shook his head.

"Hell," Frank said, batting the air with the hand which seemed to have betrayed him. "I drink too much."

"O.K.," Thure sang, as he walked away. His "O.K." sounded as if he had just learned to say it the way everyone else did.



Chapter 11

THE splash of a terrific upset in the bathroom meant that Rose was getting out of the tub. After the water churned, there was a clean silence which gave way to a sucking sound when Rose pulled out the plug.

Shane sat in the bedroom, putting thick enamel polish, dark fuchsia color, on the stout nails of her hands. The last of the water went down the drain, and the air began to take on the smells of powder and sweet, alcoholic cologne. The sound of their combs made electric crackles in their carefully waved hair which they softened around the edges of their faces. They were getting ready to go out. Their slips were of stark, cheap satin. The skin of their bare arms was clouded pink. The small knobs in their spinal columns showed beneath the taut, pale skin of their backs when they leaned over to pull up their stockings with quiet care. All the bareness, the pink and white and flesh-colored underneathness, seemed to signify that they weren't anywhere near ready. But there was eye shadow on the porous skin of Rose's eyelids, lipstick had been pressed around the bow of Shane's mouth. They were powdered. They walked from the dresser mirror to the bathroom, to the closet, back to the dresser, in high-heeled, silk-stockinged, splendid clumsiness. They were more ready than they appeared.

Their dresses were formals which they pulled slowly with

caution, first over the bust, then over the hips, then straightened and snapped up the side. Testing the seams, the two girls breathed deeply and jerked the dresses a little, smoothing them across the shoulders, the waist, and the hips. Rose's formal was of orange taffeta with a stiff bodice and a low, round neck, leaving bare her hard-boned chest. The paper-stiff material yielded uncomfortably when she put her foot on the chair and leaned to adjust the buckle of one of her silver sandals. The full-blown taffeta bow at the back of her waist reared up when she leaned over.

There was self-conscious elegance about Rose tonight. For the first time since Shane had known her, there was that look of vulnerability in the lowering of her eyes, the pretended firmness of her mouth, while she jerked at the sandal strap. There was a crisp protest in the taffeta sound her dress made, when she stood up and ran her finger inside the tight cuffs of her puffed sleeves. If ever she could look pretty, it was tonight, yet she wasn't happy. At this moment, before she forgot herself and went out in the crowd and realized that she was certainly nothing special, right now, there was a sadness in her eyes, as she looked almost shyly and with a little disgust at herself in the mirror. If anyone had complimented her, she would either have burst into tears, like a child whose feelings have been hurt, or she would have snapped back to protect her feelings. Shane looked from her half of the mirror to Rose's half of the mirror. "Geez, Rose, yuh look so pretty tonight," she said.

"Aw, don't give me that line of guff." Rose was edgy.

Shane laughed. She knew better how to take compliments, for she was used to them. Tonight she wore a blue satin blouse, the one she used to wear on Sundays when she went to church

with her mother. She had made a full, white, good-quality rayon skirt, by carefully stitching the side of the big square piece of material and gathering the top around a band which snugly bound her small waist. Then she had sewn the blouse to the skirt. It was easy to make and easy to wear, she thought, admiring the rear view over her shoulder in the mirror. Pete would like her in it, she felt sure. He'd have to.

"Real lovely," Rose said.

Just before she left to go to the wedding, which was to be at six o'clock in a Lutheran church on the North Side, Rose went into the kitchen, her coat on, and with one gloved hand holding the other glove, she drank a glass of wine.

While she washed out the glass, she called to Shane, "Hope your boy friend comes on time. You don't wanna be late for the killing." At the door, she put on the other glove. Wine seemed to make the smallest things important; the smoothness of her gloves over her hands, for example. She worked and worked at the gloves, kneading them over her fingers while Shane, suddenly excited, chattered.

"He better not be late, that guy better not, or I'll make it tough on him. He better not pull nothin' on me after I been out with him eleven times. Eleven dates with one guy, besides seein' him every day. Looks like the real thing, don't it, Rose?" Her words flashed with the fun of her confidence in her love for him, although he wasn't easy to figure out. "He keeps comin' back. He got ideas, I guess," Shane said, "don't he?"

"He sure got ideas, all right," Rose said.

As soon as Rose had gone, Shane walked back to the dresser, her full skirt swinging heavily against her legs, and she looked more closely at herself in the mirror. She looked good. Points of light, reflections from the unshaded bulb in the wall, shone

in her eyes. She had an awful lot of make-up on, but you were supposed to look more theatrical in long dresses. Her cheeks were warmly rouged and her forehead and chin were milk-white. With a heavy powder puff, she dusted her elbows white and fragrant. Then, extending her arms, she swayed back and forth, looking down at the sliding of her skirt and the whiteness of her arms, and her fingernails, wet-looking and dark red. This moment she was ready for Pete, and she wanted him to come. She wanted to walk out of the apartment, with Pete opening and closing the door for her, leave the little bedroom that held the ordinary daily things which she wanted to keep from Pete, the box of powder, the needle and thread she used to sew her slip straps to her dress, the old shoes she wore to work.

For a little while she would not mind sitting in the Morris chair, her coat around her shoulders, waiting for Pete, because it was fun to know that pretty soon he'd be here, and she could quickly get out of the chair, go down the stairs with him and go to the wedding where they would sit together, their shoulders touching. Later they would dance and look at each other once in a while, knowing it was getting close to the time when they would be getting married, too.

She shivered so that her shoulders shook, then felt suddenly warm, and the ticking of the alarm clock in the bedroom teased the quietness that held her pendent in time.

Until six o'clock, she was certain enough that he would be there any minute not to listen for the sounds outside her flat which might mean he was coming—the street door slamming, his slow footsteps from below. She did not sit long and composedly in the Morris chair, but bothered with time-consuming little tasks: straightened the dresser, put away her shoes and hung up her clothes, finished off another coat of polish on her

nails. Meanwhile her thoughts flowed smoothly through the dreams she had for Pete and for herself. He would tell her sometime soon, maybe tonight, that he had always meant to marry her, even though he had never said so. Then he would take her visiting to his home on the South Side. She didn't know just where he lived nor did she know whether or not he lived with his mother and father. He had never mentioned his family, but she guessed that they, being Hungarian, would be glad of an Irish girl in the family. They would probably be surprised at what a pretty, lively girl their quiet Pete had got. Already, in her mind, she was putting them at ease with her.

Careful not to let her white skirt touch the floor, she stepped lightly around the bedroom picking things up, and smiled to herself, thinking about the money Pete and she would make in the factory that would bring them together in an apartment that would be stylish and perfect to share.

But when six o'clock came, and it was too late to hope she could go to the wedding with Pete, she glanced at herself in the mirror, for the last time, turned out the bedroom light and walked slowly to the front living-room window. She looked down to the sidewalk, at the stairways and railings across the street. A fat old woman was walking below the window, pulling along a little child who was crying, its head back, eyes closed, mouth widening and gasping with loud baby protest. She watched two feeble, middle-aged bums prowling down the street, one carrying a large bottle of beer in a worn-looking paper sack. She kept looking down to the street, while disappointment that Pete hadn't come spread through her slowly.

If he would only come this minute, they could still go to the wedding and then to the reception. Now, they would probably not make the wedding, but it would never be too late

for the reception, which would go on all night.

For another hour, she waited alone in the little flat, and she felt as if something large and cold was turning over in her, when she thought of the things that might have happened to him. She had worried about his getting hurt or in trouble before, but he had always turned up, and then it was a relief to see his face, unaltered and pale, unsurprising and unsurprised, and know that he was perfectly all right, just late, that was all.

It grew dark with his lateness and certain faint and impersonal sounds tormented her—the slow, rising croup-cough of the elevated starting up two blocks away, the flat, static-scratched music from a neighbor's radio. She thought about Pete over and over again, until she went into the kitchen at eight o'clock and stood stock-still, tormented by the feeling that to wait much longer would choke her.

As if to prepare to catch something before it fell, she unscrewed the cap of the wine bottle and poured a glass half full. She never drank, but she had to get something in her, do something to bend the rays of her attention away from the first realization that Pete was standing her up. The wine, stinging and sweet as syrup, dispersed her first fear by making her wonder what its effect would be.

Michel and Frank were driving down Clark Street in Michel's cream-colored convertible, with the top down and the white-wall tires making the sound of rain on the warm asphalt pavement.

Michel put his cigarette out to the wind, and the sparks discharged their tiny trails.

"Christ," he said, "them German girls are big, just a hell of a lot of white meat."

They had stopped in at Stella and Charlie's wedding reception for some beer, and, seeing that Shane wasn't there, found out from Rose where her flat was and decided to take the little Irish kid out and show her a big time.

Because they had stopped for a couple of drinks on the way, it was 9:30 before they parked the car in front of Shane's flat.

"Will she or won't she?" Frank said, as they walked up to the entrance.

"Yeah, that's the question," Michel laughed. "How I wonder!" he said, leading the way through the front door. The second door was unlocked. Their steps were heavy on the sagging wood of the narrow stairway.

"We come to pay a friendly call," Frank said.

"Well, ain't that nice," Shane said, and she watched them walk past her, look around the room, and sit down; Michel on the couch, Frank in the Morris chair. She stood in the open doorway, dazed by the instant strangeness of her having let these two, who belonged in the factory, walk in on her crazy seclusion. But they might have had something to do with Pete. "What's on your mind, boys?" she said, and the words didn't seem to be hers at all. She looked afraid, not because of what they might do to her, but since they had had the nerve to break in on her, they had overreached what she had thought was possible. The night had been full of impossibilities, and as she stood watching them, the wine and the sudden entrance of the two men made her feel weak and hot, and she wondered how she could rid herself of this nervous foolishness.

"Siddown," Michel said, patting the place on the couch beside him.

"Sure," she said, and she stood where she was in the middle of the open doorway.

"Whatsamatter, baby," Michel coaxed. Frank took a bottle from the inside of his coat and placed it on the floor, striking a ludicrous, heavy sound of glass on wood, as if to call their attention to it.

"Wait a minute," Michel shouted to him with expert disgust. "Whatsamatter, baby?" He didn't wait to let her come around. He went up to her and crooked his elbow around her neck, so that her head went back. Her face was close to his, and he could see how she hated him, with the tears spreading across her eyes. "Where's Pete?" she said, and his arm pressed her neck, so that she could not easily talk.

"Oh, my God," he was purring. "Do I have to tell you something, a smart little girl like you?"

Frank found glasses in the kitchen. Shane took the water and whiskey, and they let her alone. They sat down again while she stood.

Michel drank half his glass, and leaned forward, his eyes laughing up at Shane, as he said, "Now, I want you to listen. You won't appreciate what I will say, but," he looked down at the glass lovingly, "I'm going to tell you about women and then about men, and I want you to pay strict attention. Women are tough," he spoke slowly, enjoying himself. "Women are tougher than men. Take Stella." He tried to make it simple enough for her to understand. "She pretends to be sweet and ladylike but," he raised a finger, "she's a bitch. And you're tough," he said gently, "no matter how much lace underwear you got on. O.K., that's the first thing. Are you with me?"

She took hold of the handle of the door because she was tired of standing.

"Women are so tough they run the whole world, except in Persia," Michel said.

"What's the matter with women in Persia?" Frank poured whiskey in his empty glass.

"They're tough there," Michel explained, "but not tough enough to make it a woman's world. Now this is just my private theory," he said.

Shane passed her hand over her face and down the front of her dress, and she found, with the gesture, that she was more faint than she had thought. She drank from the glass, and the bitter taste filled her with acrid revulsion.

"Now in Persia," Michel went on, "the men have something to say. In Persia, there are sultans who have twenty, thirty, sometimes forty or a hundred, wives. If the women were tough enough to run Persia, no sultan would have more than one wife at a time—if the women could help it. Persia," he dreamed aloud, "a place I'd like to go to some time. Because," he was whispering, "every other place in the whole goddam world, the women run things and they make a man out to be a bastard if he got more than one wife at a time. Maybe you didn't know," he spoke to her gently, then he finished his glass, "that it isn't natural for a man to have only one wife at a time. Did you know," he turned on Frank whose eyes were closed and whose face was laughing, "that if women didn't try to run things, men would demand," he paused, underscoring the word *demand*, "to have a different woman every other week or so?" He waited for a reaction. "Any man with the right stuff in him won't stand for one woman all the time. Did you know that?"

"You think you know all about it," Shane said, because she had to pretend that she would be able to take care of herself.

"Yeah, I know what I'm talking about. I been married once. Once is enough." Frank went to him and poured a drink. They

both watched the controlled flow of the liquor. "Keep away from her," Michel said, when Frank turned to Shane. "Never again," he continued. "I got a girl now thinks she and me are going to get married. I let her think so, but I'm not marrying her nor anybody. I get along fine the way I am. I eat the best food, sleep with the best dames, and I'm not worrying about anyone but me. Money is everything. I have plenty of it. I can buy anything and that keeps me happy."

"Funny other people don't have the same ideas on women you got," Shane said.

"No, there ain't enough guys smart as I am," Frenchie said.

"Oh, you're smart," Frank cried, and he looked at Shane, "but you're sure wastin' my precious time tonight."

"No, there just aren't enough guys smart as me," Michel explained. "So let's see what happens because there aren't enough guys smart as me. Tough women who pretend to be so goddam helpless think they can wrap a man around their little finger. And if he doesn't wrap very easily, they cry and nag. If he goes out all night, they bellyache. Women try to run the world and it doesn't work. They're the reason we get in all this trouble. Women try to tie a man down and all that happens is that he goes out and gets drunk and kills a little kid or he goes out and starts a fight, starts a war, anything to get away from the little woman. Lissen to me, mick."

"I'm lissenin'." She was not the one who was being trapped, she had to keep thinking. She was trapping them, as she stood so carefully in the doorway.

"You ain't goin' to marry Pete, because he's already married, but you could have him if you wanted him. . . ."

"He's went back to California." Frank's words were strung together with vicious awkwardness.

"What I'm saying to the little girl is," Michel looked at Shane and saw her accessibility, "married or not, you better think of something good to hold him. Variety is the spice of life. Don't bellyache when he comes home messed up by some other woman. Just go out and mess up some other guy. Oh, well," he concluded, and he watched her closely, "it's a gay life!"

Shane finished her drink and had the courage to walk past them into the kitchen, where she placed the empty glass in the sink, took a dish towel and held it to her face, pressing it over her eyes and cheeks. There was a fire to be put out, she felt, and she wanted to run, but it would be like running in a dream through mud or soft cotton.

When Frank came to the kitchen door, she wasn't afraid at all. "Frenchie's talked enough," she said to him. "I won't stand for no more of that from him or you." She bumped against him, first one side and then the other, trying to get past him to the living room.

"We'll take you any place you want to go." Michel stood up.

Shane was pulling her arm through the grip of Frank's hand.

"Anything you want. Anything money can buy," Frank said, trying to get another hold on her arm, and again, she drew it away, with his hand still trying to hold on to her.

"Whadye wanna do?" Michel's arms went out to her, and she stepped aside, then stumbled back. Both of them were teasing her now and she felt that she was scraping their hands off, shouldering them away, backing up. They laughed and fished at her, their hands always coming back, after she'd shoved them off. Michel let her alone, and it was like fighting up to the surface, after having been ducked in the water.

"Where's your coat?" he asked.

"On the bed in there." She shuddered with the desire to cry.

She took the coat from him when he tried to put it on her, while Frank turned out the lights, and they left; Shane leading the way down the stairs, out onto the hot, deserted street, where she began to run.

The sidewalk tipped up to her and back, and she picked up her skirts and fell against a brick wall, but she kept running. Just behind her, where she could not see, they might have been following her, but she did not look around, for her head was heavy and ached from running. Michel's car pulled to the curb ahead of her. While she half-ran and half-walked, panic flailed her pulse and seemed caught in her throat. They drove on down the street, the light color of the car contracting its size in the darkness, and the deep humming sound of the motor diminishing.

She walked for blocks and kept on walking until rain began to fall. Then she realized that the soles of her shoes were wet and she hurried to find an el station.

The wedding reception hall was a large, abandoned store with a *For Rent* sign in the display window. The dark entryway, with dirty walls and a ladies room off one side and a gents room off the other, was lit by a bulb covered with faded red and green crepe paper. In the ladies room the girls fussed, plumed out their skirts and gently pushed their way to the mirror. Most of them knew each other, so there were murmurs and laughter about what men there were at the reception. The politeness that had governed them was only a prelude to self-forgetfulness and wild merry-making which they all knew, before the party began, would soon let them lose their dignity.

At the end of the narrow entryway hung an out-dated sign, that said in gold-paper letters, *Happy New Year* over the

vista into the combined ballroom and banquet hall. At one side of the room were long tables forming the shape of a horse-shoe, at the other side a bandstand and room to dance. The people from the factory, who were acquainted, had found each other and sat together at the tables. Rose's attention had been partly caught by the quietly reserved antics of some of the people her age, middle-aged men, Germans, who were in a gay mood now that the serious part of the wedding day was over. But while Rose had watched them sitting down, picking up empty glasses from the table and glaring into them, shaking out the paper napkins, as if there should have been something in them, she wondered about Shane. In between laughing at the silly guys sitting around her and worrying about Shane, she had leaned forward to look at the bride and groom, who were at the head of the tables. Stella looked different. She didn't look tough. As a bride, she was sweetly round-faced, her cheeks heavily rouged, and her gray eyes paid attention to nothing but the voluminous, swelling bridal veil which Charlie and she kept fussing with. They were always looking down to see whether or not it had been stepped on, sat on, or caught under the leg of the bench.

Stella was sweet-looking as a bride, Rose decided, and Charlie was a riot, uncomfortable in his tight, rented Tuxedo and very unhappy, but Rose knew that he would soon forget his discomfort and self-consciousness when enough toasts had been drunk.

It was a German wedding. Stella's papa, who was a baker, saw to that. How else could it be? They were German, they all spoke German, the whole German neighborhood of the North Side seemed to be there. The meal was chunks of boiled meat, highly seasoned and heavy with fat, carrots, potatoes,

61
wedding cake, coffee and beer. When the dancing began, the room was hot; the men had relaxed, the children who were there had ceased being on their best behavior, and everybody was having a good time.

Stella's brother, a good-looking boy who had drunk much beer and who went about asking all the pretty girls to dance, asked Rose to dance. After that, Barry cut in on her. Everyone laughed at them, and she didn't care. The later it got, the less she worried about Shane, for she imagined that Pete and she were off alone somewhere.

Thure danced a polka with her, then went back to the table and sat down, pulling his trousers up at his knees. He folded his arms and looked down at the wooden planks of the table. For a moment he glanced up at the dancing crowd, and then he saw the bride holding the swathing white veil high, so that its gauzy cloud nearly enveloped her black-clad, confusedly grinning groom. Looking down to the cold, grease-shining plates that littered the wooden planks, he thought of what an awkward transition this was for the poor groom. Charlie was a stolid, sober, cautious man under his wise-cracking exterior. Thure thought of the women there having a good time, of how they came off the assembly line, dirty, their purses holding a pay check, and then turned up at a wedding, smelling sweet, dressed in layers of finery that hid all except what they thought it was good for them to reveal. He smiled to think of giggling, grasping women dressed in clothes they paid for themselves, of how they loved to run a wedding like this. They rallied around the bride like a flock of pigeons and treated the groom, poor fellow, as if he were a sick sparrow, flying at him a little bit, pecking at him, and waddled away feeling very important and superior to the poor man.

The flock of pigeons was clearing a space in the middle of the floor for the bride and her attendants who were about to sing the Bride's Song. Those who were not in the wedding party went back to their benches. Barry, Thure, Rose, Lillian and Leo sat together. While they settled themselves and craned to get a view of the bride's circle, Barry saw Shane standing alone under the banner.

"You're just in time." He went up to her. "There's a place for you right over here."

She said nothing. When he took her arm, he felt it trembling. Gently he led her past the laughing crowd to a place between him and Rose on their bench.

"Honey!" Rose said, and she took Shane's limp hand. "Ain't this the darnedest?"

The attendants had formed a ring around the bride. The ushers and the bride's father and the groom stood back and watched quietly, the liquor in their brains and hearts warm enough to make the women and their little German custom seem sweet.

The maid of honor took the crown of the veil from Stella's head and the bride's mother put it away forever in a box that was placed in the middle of the ring, while the women sang the plaintive little song, their voices gone suddenly childish, dragging the words but giving them the strong rhythm that goes with all songs of the people.

Shane watched the bride carefully. Everything she saw seemed fluid and hurt her eyes, except Stella's face which she watched closely. Stella was smiling. Her mouth was open so that she looked as if she might laugh or cry. Her soft mouth, pink now, the bright color eaten, drunk and kissed off, was open, as if she wanted to cry out, let the tears flood from her

eyes down her face and into her mouth that was ready to sob.

I know just how you feel, Shane wanted to cry, feeling an impending emotional outburst which was suppressed in the timid little song that was as shy as candlelight, while the bride looked both happy and unhappy. "What she's giving up," Shane told herself, her own thoughts sounding conversational in her mind, "is being a kid, a little girl. Oh," she wanted to tell them all for the bride's sake, "we wouldn't do it if we didn't want to but, oh, look at her face, will yuh, and see how hard it is to be all changed—never the same, never the same." When she looked away from Stella, her head seemed to wobble and she could not recognize anybody. She took her hand from Rose's and rubbed the wet palm on her knee. With great effort, she lifted her eyes to watch once more exactly what happened to Stella.

The bride's mother tucked the last of the veil away in the box and put the cover over it. Stella's father, a big man, boyishly lithe and strong, red-faced, his thick hair heavy with gray, shouted the name of a German song in his dense, rich voice. The older men, tears wetting the wrinkles at their eyes and cheeks, joyously sang the song that had filled, echoed, died and refilled the halls at wedding feasts in Germany for centuries. Their heads were hot-running with enough liquor to make them feel the certain strength that comes from singing an old song that belonged to them, a living quality of an old world. Their song, vibrant with the deep, synchronic men's voices, the quiet loving sympathy in the eyes of the German women, the bashful smile on Charlie's face, as he stood on the side and looked from the corner of his eyes at Stella, the smell of the beer, the warmth of light transformed the hall. It had been this way over there in the old country, and the Western Ave-

nue streetcars that rocketed back and forth outside made no difference tonight.

Barry and Thure helped Rose and Shane home. They all said good night at the bottom of the stairs, and Rose took Shane's arm on the way up, lest she hurt herself in the dark.

Wailing quietly to herself, Shane was saying moistly, "Thure thinks I oughta go back to the farm. Didge 'ear 'im, Rosie, he says I oughta go back. I jus' kept tellin' him, soon maybe, we'll all go back. Oh, Rosie, we all better leave tomorrow and go back. Didge see Lillian—how she walked out on Leo? Leo and me, didje notice, we was the saddest lookin' people tonight."

Rose turned on the pink lamp and went into the kitchen to make coffee. Shane turned it off and sat down. The street light fell over the tasseled lamp which had been Katie's pride when Bert and she were first married. Shane sat for a long time looking at it. There was nothing to do but stare, until sleep would come and take her away from the painful realization that Pete had stood her up. Exhausted and faint, she sat there quietly, as though nothing were wrong.

When Rose came in and saw that Shane was sitting, silent in the dark, she said, "Shane," and her voice woke Shane's senses, but it did not make her stir. "Will you have some coffee with me? Then you gotta go to bed."

"I guess so."

Rose groped to turn on the light.

"Don't turn it on, Rose. I'll come to in a minute."

"Well, O.K." Rose was sleepy. "First time you ever got drunk?" she asked. It was strange that Shane just sat there so quietly in the chair, not making a move to get ready for bed. Rose asked, "You have a good time tonight?"

Shane did not answer.

"Everything O.K.?" Swaying with sleepiness, she patiently waited for Shane's answer. It didn't come. She went to the kitchen, poured their coffee, and brought it back.

"No, everything ain't O.K.," Shane finally said, when the cup was in her hand, and the smell of the coffee was strong and close to her.

"How come?" Rose asked.

"Oh," she groaned, "Pete didn't show up tonight."

"The stinker," Rose offered.

"He won't come back." Shane tried to sound matter-of-fact. "I don't know *why*. How should I know why? I guess I been dumb or somethin', ain't I, Rose? I ain't got what it takes to hold a man, I guess, do I, Rose?"

Rose started to answer, but Shane interrupted. "Ain't I been dumb, Rose? Come on and say it."

Rose knew that Shane was sober now.

"He makes me so damn' mad," Shane said.

"That's what I like to hear from an Irish kid," Rose laughed.

Harsh, tearless anger had Shane by the throat. "He ain't comin' back. Because he's married."

"Take it easy, honey."

"Sure. Why should I care. It's beyond me, is all I can say. We been goin' together since November, ain't we? How many months does that make?"

Rose figured. "Six months."

"O.K. He don't say nothin', but I'm sure, see? You know that, Rose. I been sure ever since I first seen him." She was thinking hard. "Things is been too good lately, that's what. We been livin' swell here. My folks is no worse or better than they ever been. Then this happens, because things is been too

good lately.”

“Maybe the guy couldn’t help . . .”

“Don’t waste your breath. I got an ounce of brains, don’t I? Can’t I see? I had plenty time to think and figure things out tonight. I drunk a lotta wine, an’ Frenchie and Frank come up. What they had in their minds, I might never of known, becuz I was so punchie from bein’ stood up by Pete. But I got away from ’em, after I drunk some more stuff they had, and I musta walked miles. No matter how we act, we all get the same raw deal.”

Rose stopped Shane. “Listen, you’re talkin’ funny. You better try to go to sleep.”

Shane stood up, and Rose went to her, putting her arm around her shoulders and guiding her through the dark to the bedroom. “It’s almost mornin’, kid, and you don’t even sound like yourself. You’ll get over it. Take it easy.”

“I feel sick.”

“Take a day off tomorrow. You better lay off.”

“I shouldn’t take a day off. But I think I just got to. Maybe you’re right. But listen, Rose,” Shane sounded tough. “I can take care of myself. Don’t forget, I can watch out for myself.”

Chapter 12

A HEAVY wind rushed at her like an angry wave. It was the sound of the elevated train passing through, two blocks away. The sound caused her to turn over and wakened her. Her bare feet were on the cool floor, but she could not see, at first, which light was real: the one in the bedroom where the shades were down, making the room look as if the windows had been painted dark orange, or that in the living room where the shades were up and the common light from the sky at mid-morning stretched across the floor almost to the wall opposite the windows. The dispute over shades of light and time of day was half-settled in her mind when something welled up from the base of her throat, then went down, leaving behind traces, like tide marks on a sea wall, of what had happened last night.

As she wiped the cold, wet cloth over her face, she thought backwards in time to their coming home last night, Thure's arm under hers, back to the wedding hall on Western Avenue, down the line of remembrance to her standing in the doorway, holding off Michel and Frank. Before that she had been waiting for Pete. She had been dressed and ready for him to come.

The towel was thick and heavy in her hands, the floor was hard as bone under her bare heels. The flapping sound of the shades, when she pulled at them and let them up, startled the

mid-morning quiet in the apartment. It was as quiet as if the rooms had been emptied of all people since last night; as if the last person to go had closed the door and abandoned the little flat. It was twenty minutes to eleven in the morning. The blue satin blouse, sewn to the white skirt, curled and flowed over the bedroom chair. Turning around, she went into the kitchen which was strange in a mid-morning, work-day way. The sink was dry. The dishcloth which had been hung over the sink faucets was a stiff, pale gray. A fly swung up and down in front of her and in back of her, as if it had been playing alone in here while she was sleeping. Folding a newspaper small and thick, she found the fly hiding behind the kitchen curtain on the window. She killed it, and it rolled onto the paper, which she put in the wastebasket that Rose had emptied hours ago.

Rose had been quiet when she left. She had probably reached quickly to turn off the alarm, for Shane's sake, before the sound could grip her brain, like a hand, and squeeze the hated gradual awakening out of her. Rose had got out of bed with deliberate stealth so that her side of the mattress wouldn't go up too fast. Footsteps slowly tapping, she had walked about not making unnecessary sound. The small skillet on the grill of the stove had rung one soft note, rather than its usual chiming. She had put everything neatly away and had left, closing the door in slow motion and walking quietly down the stairs. The farther down the stairs she had got, the faster and sharper was her walk, until, out on the street, everything was normal once more. Rose probably hoped Shane would sleep it off, not get up, wander around, worry and plague herself.

Shane filled a pan, heavy and pendulous with water, and she thought, while she put it on the stove, of how sweet Rose

was, so sweet that she could have cried. Whenever Pete had come over, Rose had left them alone. Sometimes Shane had felt sorry for Rose, because she was not good-looking and hadn't any boy friend. She had said to her once, "Listen, you. If you take Pete away from me, I'll sock you, see? I ain't as big as you, but I sure can fight." She had stood up to the tall girl, and they had both laughed. "I could beat you up, both hands tied behind my back, but don't start nothin'," Rose had threatened in fun. Rose was so good. She never kidded herself. Rose had got to the wedding on time and had gone to the reception alone, and when Shane had stood teetering in the doorway, wet from the rain, late last night, she had seen her dancing with some older man. Her eyes had been dark, with tiny white fires in them, and she had held out her long, bone-strung arm with level grace. As they stepped lightly around, Rose had smiled and the poise of her motion had kept her head high and her back straight. Then when Rose had taken her hand, Shane had wanted to put her head in the lap of the unbecoming orange taffeta dress and cry like a baby. But Rose had seemed so good, as if she didn't know what trouble people could get into.

After that, while they sat together at the reception, she had found an idea to hang on to, the idea that Stella, the bride, was unhappy. She had looked into Stella's face, had seen that she threatened to weep while they sang the song of the old country. She had seen Charlie glancing at Stella unhappily. Her head had wobbled, so that she felt, inwardly, that something was sliding uneasily from one side to the other and back, nearly tipping her over, first pulling her over a crest, then falling heavily to the other side. But she had kept her eyes open, and had fastened herself to the idea of Stella's being a sad bride. If

Shane's eyes had closed, she would have been lost in the ascent and descent, the passing over and under of a heavy wash of dejection.

Later there had been an unidentified grief. She remembered now, as she stood watching the egg tumble in the boiling water.

Lillian had urged Leo to his feet and had started dancing with the sad-eyed, half-crazy little man. "Come on." She had shook his limp arm. "I ain't gonna hold you up, you know. La, la, la," she had sung shrilly, as she pushed him around the room. He had started to rock his arm up and down, to take long, wide steps, and he was so happy. Then she said, "Oh, My God, you ape!" And she had left him. That's what had happened to Lillian and Leo. Someone had had to help him get on the streetcar after the reception; he was so upset because Lillian had left him.

Shane turned off the flame and left the pan on the stove with the egg rolling in it. The ticks of the alarm clock on the table next to the bed seemed to pelt in one direction and then another, as she stood staring at it, until her mind became its target and she realized that it was lunch time in the factory, and she felt the sudden panic of missing out on everything.

Surrounding Leo and Rose, Barry and Thure, who had been so good, there was a larger grief, the grief that she did not dare touch too suddenly. It would be like touching the naked end of a live wire. The panic that comes with ducking and dodging the truth which one knows can't be avoided, gave her the quick and begging idea of going to work, late or not. She took off her robe and pajamas, and dressed. When she leaned over to put on her stockings and shoes, she felt the blood sickeningly full in her head and her physical being hung from one tendon, one cord. Every tie between Pete and her, between her and the balloon-dreams of an apartment with him, of his family

loving her, of their making money together, the ties between the people in the factory and her, had been cut. She was suspended, like one drop of water. And she knew, too, that she had had too much to drink the awful night before.

Although the blood squeezed her temples like hot fingers, she quickly put the things she would need in her purse—compact, lipstick, comb. She closed some drawers and pulled others out. She ran to the kitchen and drank a glass of milk. The egg had sunk cold in the pan of linty water. She would have to use it some other way, she thought, feeling the milk dense and sickly-warm inside her.

She ran back to slam all the drawers shut, to drag a paper handkerchief from the box, to close the window with more force than necessary. Each act was preceded by a wager in her mind, a warning that she would not be able to do it. Her hands went high in the air, as she pulled the bedding off the naked under-sheet and threw it back in a deflating mound at the foot of the bed. She dragged the front door shut behind her, rattled the knob to make sure it was locked, and without looking, went down the stairs so quickly that the steps seemed maddeningly short, like the steps in a children's playhouse she had once cleaned for a woman in town.

The daylight hurt her eyes.

"Where's Shane?" was Barry's first question in the morning, when he met Rose on the way into the factory.

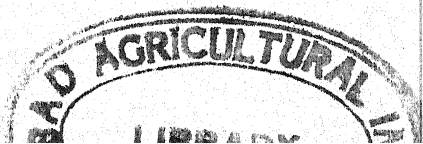
"Couldn't make it this morning."

Barry rolled up his sleeves. "She's not well this morning?"

"Not exactly that."

Barry looked at her questioningly.

"Do I hafta tell yuh what happened? You seen how she was



last night. Whadye suppose she was doin' all that time before she turned up last night?" Rose put her lunch on a bench and sat down. "Pete run out on her last night."

"Pete has run out on all of us," Barry said. "He's gone back to California."

"I suppose that's where his wife is."

"I don't know."

Rose's eyes were wide and tired. "You wouldn't think from looking at a quiet guy like that, he'd string along a young kid who don't know no better."

"I hope she can forget this soon."

"You and me know she's awful hurt." Rose stood up and tried to brighten. "Well, time to work. See you later." She walked to her line.

Factory clamor arose. Humming, ringing and explosive crashes of machinery burst down the lines. The workers settled into mechanical activity, while the bosses rushed at production.

"Where's Shane?" Michel shouted at Rose.

"She's sick," Rose said.

"I thought she didn't drink. Well, she was supposed to knock off one day this week anyway." He walked by her closely, so that she could see the specks of his whiskers on his white-skinned, cleft chin. Rose's mouth opened and she chuckled, then began to laugh. She watched him walk and she laughed until the tears came up to her eyes, kept coming, until she was crying while she laughed. His shoes were soled with thick crepe rubber, which made him spring on his little feet, as if he were trying to make a breeze ripple his dark, wavy hair.

"That guy!" As she buttoned on a smock and sniffed from having laughed so much, she turned and said to Barry, "You know, he gets a kick outa telling people he was suspected of

murder once. Not that he done it." She raised a finger which warned against overrating him. "But to think he was suspected of it anyways!"

Barry stood with a coil of wire hanging over his bare brown shoulders. Beginning in the spring, he never wore more than a clean white undershirt with his overalls. He was waiting with his mouth open for the next funny thing Rose would say.

"Once he says to me, 'My brother-in-law is in the dirtiest politics in Chicago.' 'That so?' I says. Once in a while he comes around an' annoys me an' I don't encourage him. 'Yeah, he's in the toughest, dirtiest politics in Chicago,' he says. 'He's workin' for the Board of Education.'"

Barry shifted the position of the coil of wire on his shoulders. "Do you really think that's funny?" His massive head was lowered and he looked up at her from under the squarish eyebrows that grew together over the bridge of his nose.

Rose put her hands on her hips and pressed her lips hard together. "Sometimes I think you ain't got *no* sense of humor at all," she said. Breaking the deadlock, she sat down. "That Pete," she said, and she shifted her position on the stool as if she were now going to tell Barry something from a different angle. "That Pete had her out licking the world single-handed," she said. When Rose was sitting and Barry was standing, they spoke directly, on the same level, with each other. "So whadye think of that there roommate of mine?" Rose asked.

"I like her," he said.

"You ain't got a chance." Rose was sometimes diabolical with men.

"You don't understand what I mean. I don't want her. I just like her."

As he walked away, he remembered in his dreamy way the

evening after Shane had got her raise.

"I'm glad you got a raise, Shane." He had wiped a platter and gingerly placed it on the kitchen table.

"Well, it was a tough fight, but I won," she had said. Whenever Shane talked to Barry, she seemed to be thinking about other more important things. "Say, Rose," she had called to her friend, "Pete will help me clean the house. You go ahead and do whatever you wanna."

"You and him is gettin' monotonous," Rose had called back.

"Be quiet," Shane had smiled to herself, not sharing her secret with Barry. But then she had spoken to him again to pass the time while they washed the dishes. "You know, Ed ain't such a bad guy, really. It beats me what they're all scared of."

"Well," Barry had said, and he spoke it again in his mind, as he walked along in the factory with the coil of wire heavy on his shoulders, "with a man like that, if you're not afraid, and you don't have anything to hide, you can come to terms."

"Yeah." Shane had looked at him almost with surprise at the truth of what he had said. He had seen in her eyes a frank appreciation which he had never before seen in the eyes of a girl. He was so little and dark and ugly, that women could never seem to bring themselves to look agreeably into his face except to joke with him. But there had been a brief and candid exchange of human understanding between them, as they spoke those few remarks, standing side by side, washing and wiping dishes. The simple joy of it had left Barry unable to say anything more, while it passed out of Shane, and her thoughts had turned to Pete, whose quiet knock on the door was soon heard. She had flushed and cried, "There he is!" Wiping her hands on her apron, she had rushed to the door.

Barry could remember hearing her voice in the other room,

silver-bright, laughing and chattering, while Pete's was a murmured monotone. There went through him a sudden disappointment at the absurdity of human nature. That was the way he worded it in his mind. Where, except in a desolating and mischievous universe, he had asked himself sadly, would a strong girl like Shane be directed to that faint-hearted man. How intolerable it had been to watch Pete's strengthless gray eyes and then turn to Shane's mobile, laughing face. He had left, thinking to himself, if time and something misnamed love are going to bring these two people together, I'm not going to stand around and watch.

When Shane showed up, it was ten minutes after twelve. The lonely silence of the apartment had been no comfort. She had needed somewhere to go and something to do. When she had decided to work on the afternoon shift, she could not get there fast enough. She had to hold herself from running up the factory stairs. But when she punched the time clock, she wished that its bell would not ding. She tried to figure out whether the other workers would notice her more, if she walked in before the lunch time was over, when they were messing around, or afterwards, when they were all sitting at work, bored and always on the lookout for something different to happen, like a fight between her and Michel.

It was too late to run back down the stairs. She had punched the time clock and that meant business. She could only stand there and know that when she walked down the tachometer line, blushing, everyone would look up at her, pale-faced and calm, smug because they never got into trouble, laughing among themselves because they were smart. They hadn't the nerve to stick up for their rights; they never waded in, blind

and furious, slugging left and right, because they knew they would come back, beaten up, if they tried it. She would pay no attention to them. Frenchie could come up and scream at her, and she would not even notice him. Frank could laugh in her face; Barry and Thure could look at her sadly and shake their heads, as if she were hopeless, and she would not let it bother her. And all the hundreds of women could taunt like jay birds, and she would only act proud.

She started the walk down the wide corridor, around the dark corner with black cages full of small-parts stock on both sides, into the light from the great windows that looked onto the Small Parts Department. The bell had just rung. As she walked, the men who always watched when a girl went by lifted their heads like animals that look up from grazing. In the place of their words or whistles were the clacking voices of machinery, sounding out racket that came at her and closed over in back of her. The heads rose and sank, and she walked faster.

Rose and Barry were the two on the tach line who noticed that Shane had come in to work.

"You shoulda stayed home, kid," Rose scolded gently.

"Aw, I thought about the money, and I couldn't resist."

"I may as well tell you," Rose leaned toward her confidentially. "He's went to California." She smiled, as if the news should make Shane happy. "The quitter!"

"I s'pose his wife is there?"

"I don't know." Rose saw the question in Shane's eyes. There was no rouge on her cheeks. Her hair was tucked behind her ears. She wore an old brown-and-tan checked dress which she probably used to wear on the farm.

"I guess he's out of your life, for good, the rat." Rose made

it final as if she was afraid that Shane still thought there was a chance.

"We're behind on production," Shane said. "I'll meet you after work."

To Barry, Rose said, "Did you see her comin' back to work? That kid's O.K. She can take it. She can take care of herself." She winked and smacked him on the back. "She says, 'We're behind on production.' Imagine that! What a kid."

"Nothing gets her down," Barry added for Rose.

"Yeah. That's it. Nothin' gets her down. So long."

Barry inspected the wire. "That's it. Nothin' gets her down. So long," he thought, in that exact order, and he looked up across the level of machinery at Shane. She had tucked her hair behind her ears. Her chin and mouth were set, and she wasn't looking up from her work.

Wiping his hands on a rag, he quickly walked toward her. In Barry's eyes, when he looked down at her, was deep brown sadness, the heartbreak of the whole world. She felt that he was making calf-eyes, and she worked faster. She did not want anyone to feel sorry for her, nor did she like to be mooned at.

"Some people are happier when they work just as hard as they can," he said, his voice coming down on her heavily.

What a thing for him to say, she thought.

"You'll forget," Barry's voice was deep and solemn through the noise. "Time takes care of us. It'll take a couple of centuries, but in a month or so you'll be happy again," he said. "That doesn't make sense, does it?"

"No," she said wearily.

He was sorry he had not put over his idea about time, for he thought it was a good one. As if he suddenly had a better idea, he lowered his head and said carefully, "Would you like to

go with me on a picnic to Lincoln Park, Sunday?" He waited. "If it's a nice day? I've been thinking about how pleasant it would be, if it's sunny." Looking down at the top of her head, he wished she would turn her face up.

"I don't know." She pressed the valve of an air hose that blasted the dirt out of a cylinder with a rush of sound that gave her time to think while he waited. She had gone past Lincoln Park in a bus once. She had seen a fat man lying on his side, his chest puffy in a tight-knit shirt, a straw hat on the side of his face, one fat, white, hairy arm crooked under his head and the other lying along his body, the hands relaxed yet supplicating, like those of a dead man. Women had been sitting among the boxes and crumpled paper of picnics, children had been playing on the cinders of the bridle paths, putting their fingers in the drinking fountains to send up high streams of water.

She didn't want to go where many people were out having a good time. Yet she did not want to be alone.

"Why don't you come out to my farm sometime, instead," she said.

"Sunday?"

"Oh, sure, Sunday."

"I have only a minute," Barry said.

"Go back to work then." Shane was only kidding. He had to leave, anyway.

Her eyes still hurt as much as they had when she first stepped outside that noon. It was a sensation that put her teeth on edge. She looked up once toward the windows, purposely dazing herself with more light and more pain, to rid herself of the tight, aching feeling in her eyes.

As she went through the irresistible process of broaching

links, she thought of the empty place behind her where Pete had sat, and she was proud of her self-control. Only far back in her mind was she hotly impatient, mad at the world, mad that there seemed to be nothing to take her mind off her hurt, nothing to carry her away from this nightmare, nothing even good to think about. It was like being sick and weak and having to pretend to be amused, when what you wanted was to be left alone, to close your eyes and mouth, and let the pain sink in. The awful part was that you wanted to get away from even yourself. But she had controlled herself.

If she hadn't been strong with herself, she could have lain in bed, her eyes closed, feeling the hot, black, smarting thoughts, maddening as inescapable heat. Then she could have cried. And after she had cried, she would have felt sodden, cold gray, dismal as slow rain falling in mud. It would be different if you could cry the thing out, but this sort of thing, losing your boy friend and finding out terrible things about him, couldn't be cried out. It lasted and lasted.

Kindly Joe Kajinsky stopped by to show her the governor of a tachometer which worked stiffly at the hinges. His voice, soft and singing, asked her to loosen the governor, take it apart perhaps. It was a remark as brief as the sight of his calloused, blacklined worker's hands fumbling the governor over three or four times, while he passed the words to her. When he had gone, and the weight of the governor was in her own hands, there was a quick hope in her that someone else in the factory might speak to her as impersonally and kindly as Joe had.

Each one spoke to her briefly. Michel bent over her and said, "Don't come till noon tomorrow, and then you'll be all square about last Sunday." He paused, and she waited cautiously. "Baby," he said. Was he pretending that they hadn't

met last night?

Looking over her head, as if he did not want to appear to be talking to her, but leaning toward her, Frank said, "Some time I'll tell you how you saved me a lotta money, kid, payin' for a couple of dents on Frenchie's fender." When he hesitated, but didn't walk away, Shane took a chance and said, "O.K., you do that, smart guy." It was like giving him a little push to send him away, and it worked. He left to go back to his place on the line. What Frank said came the closest to swinging the sickeningly heavy weight of remorse into her mind.

Lillian asked her why she didn't wear a prettier dress than the one she had on. Jackie and she had a drink of water together. "After this, I'm layin' off o' beer entirely, my dear," was all Jackie said.

Toward the end of the afternoon, Thure tapped her shoulder, and asked her if she had dropped something. It was a tissue she used for a handkerchief. At first, Shane paid no attention to him. She had established a policy by the way she had treated Barry, and she must treat them all that way.

"Are you pumping water with that pump handle?" he asked, pointing to the machine.

She wanted to laugh, but she was afraid she might cry if she tried it.

Thure saw that today the highlights of Shane's face were turned off. She was pale and tired and looked as if she hadn't had enough to eat. Often Thure had watched her and admired her, still thinking of his cousin. He found it marvelous that Shane was like a highly colored mask of Selma, a mask that had come alive, even making what had seemed alive less vital. His cousin's face was edged in milky half-tones, as if she were bloodless, the way dreams are bloodless. In Shane, the swell

of the cheeks, the childish, stubborn, short bone of her chin, the eyebrows curving exactly the way the upper lids of her eyes curved, and the abundance of hair were Selma's. Shane's skin was intense and gave the Irish girl the substance that he could not recall in the dream-memory of his cousin. Shane's eyes were a stronger blue, her hair was dark and ruddy, her skin had the rosiness that is in the faces of children when they have been playing in the snow. Compared to Selma, Shane was an exaggeration, a girl in a chorus, seen close-to, red and blue make-up firing her face. But today she did not look well. "I would like to see you away from here," Thure said.

"This work ain't hard. It's easy." Her voice and face were sullen to cover her sadness. "Would you like to come out on my farm that you're always yellin' about?" Shane asked. "Sunday?"

"I would like to see you on your farm," Thure said. "You will meet me later after work at the time clock?" He walked away.

She had surprised herself by asking him to come along, too. The real reason was that she did not want to be alone with Barry whose brown eyes were too keen and rich in color when he looked at her. When Thure talked to her, he did not lean over her. He stood straight and the expression of his face was tranquil except when he made little jokes. Then his cheeks arched and there were depressions on either side of his smiling mouth.

At the time clock he said, "I must work overtime. I just want to tell you." The almost white eyelashes did not flicker, but his cheeks were arched a little, "I am so glad to be going out to see your farm with you. I think you must get away, and I must get away where it is quiet, for," the speech was longer than

he intended it to be, "we are both used to it."

"Rose and Barry are comin', too," Shane waved to him, and left him to find Rose.

"For a girl in a factory where women come a dime a dozen, you sure got a way with the men," Rose said.

"I'm goin' to bed without no supper," Shane said.

Chapter 13

IT WAS early in the morning when they got off the train in the small town, and the air was warm and calm. Barry walked with Shane, while Thure and Rose walked behind them under the large trees that spread green darkness over the streets. It was warm enough for them to carry their coats. Barry believed that in the last few hundreds of years his people had lived through days of warmth like this and that he, therefore, was happiest when it was warm.

For me, Barry thought to himself, it is like walking in a dream. The air lifted his spirit so that he felt tall.

"I couldn't run today if I had to," Shane said.

She feels it, too, Barry thought, this sweet laziness that slows the pace.

When they got to the edge of the town, Barry sat down on the side of the road and said, "Excuse me for a minute, while I become the primitive man of the past," and he took off his shoes and socks.

"Oh, My Gawd," Rose said, "you dope!"

"I know how you feel," Shane said. "The air feels so good on your bare feet."

"Why don't you take off your shoes, too?" Thure asked Shane.

Shane frowned, then pretended to be sad. "When I was a kid, I didn't wear no shoes most of the time to save on shoe leather, I guess." She turned to Rose, explaining. "Farm kids don't wear shoes. So when I come up to the big city," she laughed, "I guess I made up my mind I would wear shoes now that I got the dough to pay for them."

"That's the difference between you and me." Barry stood up and they walked on. "I didn't wear shoes either when I was a kid, but I like not wearing them now, because they remind me of how it was to be poor." He was talking in his fancy way again. "I knew nothing but poverty when I was a kid, but I was happy then, so poverty doesn't scare me now. I feel sorry for you," he turned and bowed to Shane, "because you are proud and scorn what you used to be, a poor kid living on a farm. I can tell you such things," he turned and bowed to her again, "because you are wise and can take it."

"Sure, I can take it." She jerked her elbow at him, and he nearly lost his balance. "It takes all kinds to make a world," Shane called over her shoulder to Thure and Rose.

The road stretched endlessly, but they climbed between barbed wire, walked through a thick poplar grove that stalked a piece of high ground. Shane took them through a forest preserve and across a neighbor's farm, until they were weary and no one said much.

"Jeez, will yuh figure out how long we been walkin' this way?" Rose finally spoke up.

Barry was silent as they went single file down a muddy cow-path. He had put his shoes on again.

"Lost in meditation, Antamaraine?" the Swede asked.

"I was thinking," Barry said, "how sorry I am that I must go back to Chicago this afternoon. I am going to supper at Inter-

national House."

"Goin' back this aft?" Rose asked. "I think I better, too."

No one showed interest in what International House was. He would have liked to explain it to them. To him, International House was a place where people from all the countries of the world would live together happily. In the sitting room of International House, one might see a Chinese girl wearing a narrow skirt that was slit up the sides; the swarthy faces of small-bodied intellectuals from countries of greater artistry than that of the United States; ugly, fat young girls wearing glasses over the shining grayish flesh of their smiling faces; an old Hebrew, long-faced with a goatee. Barry enjoyed thinking about International House.

The wind, which grew stronger as the sun went higher in the sky, tugged at the four people who crossed the Kearneys' untended pasture that lay ragged and dry-choked with hay, thyme, buttercups, timothy and wheat gone to seed. When Thure paused to look around at the small farm, they all stopped and watched him, as if he were an oracle or a surveyor. Barry's hands rested comfortably in his pockets, while Thure's hands were at his side, the open palms turned back, as he stood like a farmer looking his land over.

"Whadye think of our place?" Shane cried. "Up-to-date, the last word, ain't it?" She scoffed too much. Thure knew she was ashamed.

"Here, you are too close to the road," Thure said. "You run only a little way to the mail box, you can walk to the town in a few minutes, the orchard is just outside the back door and you don't need much snow fence."

"Oh, quit kiddin'. That ain't the way a farmer talks."

"Good farmers don't talk at all." He stopped teasing her.

His eyes narrowing, he was trying to look at the Kearneys' farm from Shane's point of view, trying to see what made her dislike it. It was badly in need of repair.

Shane pushed her hands hard into the pockets of her leather jacket. "O.K., if yer gonna take it so serious, I ain't gonna hang around while you count fence posts."

The wind thrown against her seemed to drive the words down her throat and make her feel suddenly exhausted. They began walking toward the Kearney farmhouse. "Too much for me," Shane cried.

Rose and Barry walked behind Shane and Thure with their heads lowered and an unconscious look of distress on their faces from this effort to withstand the wind.

"Don't get mad," Thure said to Shane, and she was too tired to be antagonized.

"What I like about Chicago," she said after a while, and there was a teasing insistence in her shouting voice, "is you can buy food in the delicatessen downstairs and pick up your mail at the front door and the snow melts down the sewers."

Thure shook his head and looked at her sideways with droll compassion. "You Irish are stubborn," he said.

"What happened to your people . . .?" Barry began, then he waited for Thure to finish.

"When you live on a farm, you're always running to market, probably to pick fights with the people in town. And when you live in town you try to grow vegetables in the garbage dump between your flat and the one next door."

Barry laughed happily. Thure spoke so well.

"You can't change the Irish," Rose sang.

"Do you mind," Shane stopped and turned on the three who stood in the wind smiling at her, "if I don't like the idea of

coming back to this forever? You can get used to anything except loneliness, and that's why I never liked it around here after I grew up."

The ground under their feet was rough, as they walked on.

"I would not like to live on this farm either," Thure said, "but for me, it would not be the loneliness that I would hate. I have told you what it is about this farm that I don't like. It is too close to town, too small . . ."

"Me? I'm livin' in Chicago, myself," Shane cried shrilly.

As they approached the kitchen door, they had an odd glimpse of Mr. Kearney walking from one shed to another with a bucket of feed. His overalls were faded and washed gray; they were patched and hung loosely on his thin body. He gave no sign that he recognized Shane, and she said nothing to them about his being her father. It was Sunday, and she was afraid he was wandering around drunk, after having been on a binge last night.

They walked on into the farmhouse. Thure's voice was unchanged and matter-of-fact in the sudden calm of the quiet farm kitchen. "Some week end soon when we can take some time off, we will all go up to my part of this country, to the farm my friends, the Ericksons, own. There they walk a mile to the mail box and they are still clearing, and there is a lake on their farm. I want to show you that farm. If you think this is hard to work, this little place, you must see my farm, the Ericksons' farm."

"I got a job in a factory in Chicago, yuh know," Shane said.

"Two or three days in my country would do you good," he said.

"Sure, it would be swell, but not for me," Rose said. "I think I'll spend three days at Riverview Park on Western

Avenue. None of those real wild animals for me."

"It doesn't much matter where you go. You must have people," Barry said. He, too, declined. Chicago was big enough to hold all the people he cared about, Barry was thinking, the Irish, Germans, Armenians, that goat-bearded man, the slender Chinese girl. There was room for all of them.

Mrs. Kearney and Katie had started Sunday dinner and they were sitting in the parlor, waiting, when Shane and her friends arrived. They came to the kitchen to say, "Pleased to meetcha," and Rose was surprised that Katie seemed so different on the farm from the way she had been in Chicago. She and her mother wore the same kind of dresses, made from mail-order catalog yard-goods material. They both wore hair nets; Mrs. Kearney, because it was Sunday and she had made herself neat to go to church; Katie, because she had had her hair waved yesterday.

"If I was you I would take them in the parlor," Katie said to Shane, while Mrs. Kearney took a roast from the oven and began slicing it. "We'll call you when everythin's ready."

"Sure is nice," Rose said loudly to Mrs. Kearney. "Sure do appreciate this."

The sunlight was pale on the gray-painted floor of the parlor and the flower-figured walls which Mrs. Kearney and Shane had papered. A leather rocker and a horsehair sofa, waxed flowers in a tin vase, Mr. and Mrs. Kearney's wedding picture, a lace runner on the sideboard, were each in its fixed place. Each object pointed to the next, as one looked around the little room, and was offset by the strange slant of the floor which listed toward the long, narrow windows with the peony buds showing above the sill. Barry stood uncomfortably, while the others sat. They were quiet, for they all felt strange. Shane

had never entertained company at home before, and neither Rose nor Barry had ever visited in the country. The good smells of the dinner distracted Thure, and he remembered the Sunday dinners Mrs. Erickson had made for her men, after which they used to stretch out under a tree and sleep for an hour. Here the smells were good, the house was clean. Thure looked at Shane who sat straight and unsmiling on the uncomfortable-looking horsehair sofa, and thought that forlorn pride seemed to touch everything on the farm—the unpainted barns, the old-fashioned buggy left standing on the edge of the pasture, the rusty pail with the bottom knocked out next to the pump. He saw the same worn self-respect in the furnishings which had been brought all the way from Ireland, and even in the little things, like the tin vase, which had been bought at the ten cent store in town. And he heard it in the quiet steps of the women in the kitchen. Shane sat staring at the floor, as if she wished they would leave.

Katie called that dinner was ready, and they went to the kitchen in awkward silence. Five places were set and there were dishes of succotash, stewed tomatoes, sliced meat, potatoes and bread. They were hungry, and they all thanked Mrs. Kearney as they sat down.

“Ma said I could eat with you young folks,” Katie said. “My kids are sleepin’ and they’ll eat later.”

Again they were silent, as they passed the food to each other, until Barry spoke. “Is this good Irish cooking?”

Shane looked at her mother who sat in the rocker at the window, and she laughed. “No!”

“The reason I thought so,” Barry put down his fork, “is that wherever you are in the new world, you can find something of the old world. There is nothing new or different in America.

We are old and we are the way the people of the different countries of the old world have always been," he said cryptically. "And we're America."

"You oughta be a minister." Shane almost admired the dramatic tone of his voice when he said, "We're America."

"Of course," Barry turned politely to Mrs. Kearney, "what is Irish about you is new and different to me, but I get along with you anyway."

"You get along with me because I ain't Irish. I'm from Ulster," Mrs. Kearney said, her voice surprisingly strong, and they all laughed.

Shane was proud and relieved that her mother knew how to talk with Barry who, even though he was a queer guy, was her friend. But she was afraid of what Katie might say. When Shane had sent home a card which read, "Sunday three pals and me are coming out," she should have added, "The Hungarian kid ain't coming with us." Katie, however, when she had first seen Thure's white-blond hair and weathered skin, knew that he was different from Pete, and she thought the Swede was a new boy friend.

After they had eaten, they thanked Mrs. Kearney again. Barry offered to wash the dishes, but Shane knew that her mother would not let this dark-looking fellow work in her kitchen. Besides, men had never helped in Mrs. Kearney's kitchen. Thure did not offer to help because he knew that men were not supposed to do women's work on the farm.

"I hate to go, but I must know when the next train leaves for Chicago," Barry said.

"Pretty soon," Shane told him. "Do you gotta leave?"

"Me, too," Rose said.

Shane did not ask her why she was leaving with Barry. She

knew that Rose could hardly wait to get back to town. The country was too dead for her.

"Shane and I will stay until later," Thure said, "but we will walk with you to the train."

"You're the bossiest guy," Shane turned to him. "Oh, well, I don't care." She was tired and she knew that she would have to tell Katie and her mother about Pete if she were left alone with them. She did not want to have to talk about him, but she was not yet ready to take the long ride back to Chicago. What she wanted was just to hang around the dead old farm a while longer, and she would not mind if Thure stayed.

She felt better after Rose and Barry left. Barry had tried to pretend that he got a kick out of walking barefoot and he had talked about America, but he was glad to jump on the train, and so was Rose.

"We'll see yuh later," they had yelled, and Thure and she had watched them walk down the aisle of the coach as the train pulled out.

"Barry's a queer guy," she said, as they stepped off the station platform to the road. "Bein' with him, him bein' so foreign-looking, makes me feel queer, too."

"He isn't so strange." Thure was taking long steps and his hands were in his trouser pockets. "He's just a little more dark-skinned than you are."

They found the sky thick with small clouds that held the ruddy color of the early summer sunset. Shane turned up the collar of her leather jacket. The wind had softened, but it was growing cooler.

Maybe she was telling these things about Barry to the wrong person. Thure spoke with more of an accent than Barry did. Thure was probably newer in the country than Barry. "When

did you come to the U.S.?" she asked.

Their words seemed to be accented by the rhythm of their steps.

"In 1931," he said. "I was nineteen years old."

Her mouth worked as if she were talking to herself. Then her face brightened and she walked with more assurance. She had figured out in her head how old he was. He was thirty-two years old. Figuring out numbers like that in her head was something she enjoyed doing. "What did you think of it, when you first got here in this country?" Funny how people are more polite when they are alone, she thought. He was being real nice. It was so easy to talk with him, as they walked together down the lonely road, with the sky scattered pink from one horizon to the other over their heads.

For a long time he did not answer her question. Maybe he just ain't payin' no attention to what I said, she thought. But it didn't bother her. He could ignore her questions if he wanted to.

"I tell you what I thought when I first came," he said finally. They walked more slowly. "When I came, I came right to Chicago from New York. Well," he laughed, "in those days, I could say only a few words in English. The first day I was here . . ." he kicked at a stone—never before had she seen him a little self-conscious—"I wanted to go to Ravenswood, where I had some friends, and I didn't know where I was or how to get to Ravenswood." He waited, as if to say, how would you get to Ravenswood if you did not know how to speak English, you did not know anybody in Chicago, and you had been in this country less than a week, and you were young and shy? "Well, I stopped a man who was walking along the street. He was an ordinary man, nicely dressed and quiet-looking. Just

average. I said to him, '*Talar ni Svenska?*' He looked at me a minute and smiled. 'No,' he shouted, 'I can't talk Swedish.' They always think that if they say it loudly we will understand. This fellow did not walk away from me. He was too fine. So when I asked, 'Ravenswood?' 'Yes, I'll show you,' he said very loud and slow, 'I'll show you.' And he took my arm and led me to the streetcar line. Then he said, very loud and slow, 'This street car to Belmont. Belmont to Ravenswood.' I looked afraid, for I did not understand so well, and I was young and my directions were mixed up. 'Go on this car to Belmont. Change at Belmont and get on a car that says Ravenswood.' 'Thank you so much,' I could only say. 'Thank you so much.' 'No.' The fellow thought a minute and he looked at me kindly. 'Wait.' He stood with me until a streetcar came, and that fine fellow got on it with me. We just smiled at each other once in a while as we rode along. I was so grateful to that man! At Belmont he got off with me. 'Thank you so much,' I could only say, and while we waited for the Ravenswood car, he kept saying very loudly, 'You'll be all right,' and he patted my arm. He said it over and over like that, 'You'll be all right,' while we waited. When I got on the next streetcar, he stood there and waved at me. He waved and nodded his head as if he were saying, 'You'll be all right,' until we turned the corner." His story over, Thure's eyes went back to roving the skyline. "And that's why I thought this country was wonderful, that fine fellow."

After a moment, Shane asked, "Did you get to Ravenswood?"

"Sure," he laughed.

They said no more until they got back to the farm.

"I want to look at that buggy," he said.

"Sure thing."

Thure brought up odd questions in her mind, things she had never before thought of. She did not know if she should ask them, because she thought they might sound as if she was butting into his business. But she went ahead with the biggest question, as they walked through the orchard to the buggy that stood next to the fence in the pasture. "Why did you come to this country?" she asked him. Again he did not work hard to think of the answer, but he waited a long time to tell her.

"I don't know why I came here. I loved my family, but I wanted to get out and make my own way."

His answer was not enough for her. She knew that much about leaving one's family.

"Oh, I'll tell you what I think." Now he was having to work for what he wanted to say. He stopped, moved his hands in his pockets and rocked a little on his feet, as he thought. "I wanted to be an American, I guess." He spoke slowly. "I wanted an American haircut and an American suit of clothes, and I wanted to talk American. I don't know why I came here except that I was young and this was the wonderful country one dreamed of."

"Sometimes I bet you dream of the old country?" She wanted to tease him, for he looked sad.

He shook his head, not as if to say no, but signifying that he could say nothing.

There were things in Thure's mind that he might have told her, about skiing cross-country at night when the snow dipped into the darkness and the stars fairly crackled because he was so happy; about riding to church in a sleigh at 4:30 o'clock Christmas morning, the thick fur rug tickling his chin and the

older ones in the family singing into the forest as they sped along.

Shane climbed up and sat on the buggy, while Thure examined the lines of the ancient model. As he walked around and around, reaching to touch the dry wood and cracked leather, he was struck by the irreconcilable contrasts in his life. The boy who had sailed along the Baltic coast, the wind pulling at the blue-and-yellow flag on the mast of his little boat, was a dream now, a picture in his mother's photograph album, while the real Thure was a man in work clothes, a factory hand living in Chicágo, common as all people who work with thousands of other people must be common. The contrasts in his life were irreconcilable, but why try to reconcile the contrasts in one's life, anyway, when so much happens in a lifetime that can not be controlled?

An axle was broken, he noticed. The buggy was nothing but an old piece of junk, yet he looked it over carefully while Shane sat high up on it and stared across the deep, purpling sky.

He knew how it had happened, this complete reversal in his life. It was quite clear and factual: His father—everyone's story must begin with one's father—was a schoolteacher who renounced his heritage for servility because he was of a queer turn of mind. Herr Larsson had a large family, but he provided less and less for them as the family increased. When the rich grandmother died, leaving the large estate to a more competent member of the family than Thure's father, the boys had to turn from school to learning trades. After having been trained as an apprentice to a blacksmith, Thure ran away. There was the blind spot in his life. There, when he ran away to America at the age of nineteen, was the unaccountable episode that severed

midway the natural course of his life. And so he would not end up, as the philosophers say, where he began. Instead, he would end up far afield. "So far from here to there," he said aloud in Swedish, and laughed.

"How much'll yuh give us for this here buggy?" Shane jumped down to the ground.

"We have many like them lying around in the hay fields of upper Michigan."

"The way you talk about it, it sounds like across the ocean or somethin'."

"I went up there the first summer after I came to this country, and I logged in the woods." Slowly they walked toward the house. "When I found *linea* growing around the little fir trees, I had the feeling it was Sweden. We skied in winter, and in the spring and fall I helped the Ericksons on their potato farm."

The kitchen light was turned on. It was a small, bright flare stretching a pattern of the window across the dark ground. Her mother and father and Bobby would be sitting down to supper.

"Up there it is cool every night. It is hard on the women during the winter, but it is beautiful in summer. I will always want to be in the north country in summer time."

They stopped walking. The air was unearthly still.

"When I was a boy, I spent all my spare time in summer fishing in the small, lowland lakes of the marsh-country. My friends and I would carry our small, homemade flat-bottomed boat through a cedar swamp to a lake that was fringed around with moss." He realized that he had talked as much to her as if he had been drinking. "Shall we go in?" He went toward the kitchen door.

Her father would be saying queer things, her mother would be silent, and Bobby would not drink his milk.

"Maybe not," she said.

"You want to take the next train back to Chicago?"

"Not exactly." It made her sick to think of going back to the apartment, because that awful night had made her tired, and the apartment kitchen still reminded her of the struggle with Michel and Frank. "Did you hunt in Sweden?" she asked.

"We hunted tjader, which are wild fowl that look like large black roosters. The birds roosted in the topmost branches of the largest fir trees. Donna, my dog, I trained so carefully to stand at the foot of the tree and bark at regular intervals, luring the tjader down from branch to branch until it was within a good shooting range. If a less intelligent dog than Donna barked or jumped around the tree, the tjader would soar up and away without so much as a backward glance."

They were walking down the road to the highway. His talk lulled her and made her feel as if she were walking in her sleep. She trusted that he could see where they were going, although it was dark.

"For fishing," he continued, "it is important to notice conditions, the strength of the wind, whether or not it is cloudy, the temperature of the air and, most important of all, the particular stage of the moon."

"How would it be now?" she asked.

"Better later," he said. "If you want to visit the Ericksons later, perhaps you'll come with me. Perhaps you will need to get away." He helped her up the embankment to the highway.

Chapter 14

WHEN they got off the train at the lumber-yard village in upper Michigan, it was growing cold, for the sun had just gone down. The sky held a cerulean-blue light that blackened the ground and the trees and the low, flat-topped buildings around the train crossing.

"Here's Antela." Thure carried their bags to a car parked on the highway next to the train tracks. The front door of the car opened and a short, round-faced Finn stepped out. Antela and Thure shook hands. Thure turned around to Shane who stood waiting and shivering while the men greeted each other. "Where's your wife?" Thure asked Antela. "My friend doesn't want to be the only woman in this man's country."

"She run the station while I'm gone." There was something sheepish about the stocky little man."

"I don't mind. I'm all right," Shane laughed.

Antela shook her hand heavily, then put the bags in the trunk of the car. "He's the one who runs the garage in town," Thure explained as they got in the front seat. "He'll drive us to the farm."

They waited for the Finn to slam and lock the trunk door.

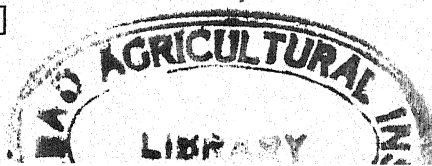
No one spoke, as they rode the narrow asphalt highway out of the village over the ground swells, between the porous black

walls of forest, out onto the blueberry fields which had been cropped by forest fire five years ago. Hollow stalagmite trunks of charred trees stood aslant against the deep, blue sky. For miles there were no houses, no lights seeping through the darkening evening. There were only the variations of forest and barren, out-in-the-sticks, open country.

As if he were concentrating on the thrum of the motor and the margins on either side of the road between the asphalt and the embankments, the Finn drove fast and with intensity, until they were startled by a sudden impact against the radiator of the car. A large, white bird of some sort—they could not see, for it happened too fast—had flown in the way of the car. The violent encounter sent the bird over the hood and against the windshield, before it dropped behind, tumbling dead in the road. It was nothing more than a thumping against the windshield and a fluttering of white, but Shane could feel how the feathers had been torn from the blood-sticky skin and the bones dislodged from the bone sockets. A wave of excitement seemed to break over her, as the car sped up again.

"That is always too bad, but it can never be helped," Thure apologized to Shane for the unpleasant killing. Then Thure asked Antela in Finnish if the township let him drive the school bus still, drunk or sober. The Finn laughed and said yes. It felt strange to sit between two men who talked a foreign language and seemed to pay no attention to her. She wished that Rose had come.

They were being carried, as if in a dream, over the hills and around the curves of the hills, until the car again slowed down, this time for a deer that sprang out of the side of the woods across the road. It stood and watched them, bounding away just before they coasted up to it.



"That was nicer, wasn't it?" Thure smiled, but did not turn to look at Shane.

Mutual happiness filled the three of them for having seen the deer.

"A buck," Antela announced. He knew, for he had shot many a buck.

It was a wondrous and lovely thing to catch sight of an animal whose existence was lost in the vast secret of deep woods, the seasons, the mating, the drinking, the finding of food and the roaming, the constant losing of itself from the alien man-animal, until this happened: the deer just chanced to cross before the roaring, swift charge of the little man-animal's car. In the splitting of the moment the men and the girl had watched, the deer had seen. The deer did not understand, but the men and the girl saw, and they understood. At least they understood that they had seen a deer, and it made them happy. It was an odd experience for Shane. If she ever got back out of this wild country, she would often tell about that deer. Shane had seen the deer and she had realized that she had been initiated into this alien part of the country.

It was late when they finally turned into a side road, crossed a bridge over the river and drove up to the farm. The Erickson family had gone to bed, they could see, for there were no lights except in the summer kitchen, a separate building, where Shane was to stay. The Finn helped them carry their luggage to the door, and hurriedly got back in the car, anxious to get to town.

Mrs. Erickson had left a kerosene lamp in the room on the first floor of the summer kitchen, and a fire glowed in the window of the Franklin stove. Thure, who was to sleep in the barn, explained to Shane how to work the kerosene lamp.

Then he said good night. "You will be all right," he said before he closed the door. "You will like it here. It is too dark to see anything now."

She took the lamp and went upstairs. The bed had been made, and Mrs. Erickson had turned down the sheets, leaving an extra quilt at the foot in case it got colder during the night. Exhausted, she first unpacked her small suitcase, then she slowly undressed. After that, she opened the small casement window and stood listening. As if she knew what she was waiting to hear, she smiled when the distant clamoring squeal of many bush wolf cubs faintly impaled the cold, quiet night.

Thure had explained to her that she should listen for this sound. "The mother is on one side of the river and the young are on the other side. The young call and the mother swims across to them," he had explained.

The yipping had ceased and the vast, cold silence was sealed once more. She wondered, as she stood at the open window, where in the darkness the hay barn was where Thure slept.

Before she went to bed, she identified the smell in the air. It was cedar. And it was the threat of frost, damp spider webs, cold drops of moisture on columbine leaves and the tangled wild raspberry leaves, sawdust and the smell of a potato cellar.

She blew out the lamp, and the smell of kerosene added to the strangeness. She had paid a lot of money for the ticket all for just two days in this quiet country. They would have to go back to work Monday. But the idea was to forget that now, to forget everything.

"So you work in a factory in Chicago," Mr. Erickson said the next morning at breakfast. He wore his old felt hat even at the table, Shane noticed.

"He don't wear it to the table, only to breakfast," Mrs. Erickson explained to Shane, treating her visitor like a lady. And Shane wondered if it was a custom of the farmers up here in the North to wear hats to breakfast.

Turning politely to Mr. Erickson, Shane said, "Until I got my job in Chicago, I lived on a farm out of town."

"That so?" He was the kind of man who didn't pay much attention to the trend of other people's conversation. He followed his own train of thought. "Thure, why don't you come up to log with my boys out to the camp?"

Shane watched Thure who looked this morning as if he belonged here instead of the assembly line in the factory. Perhaps he seemed more like a farmer because he wore overalls and an old lumber jacket, or it might have been because of the way he ate the bacon and eggs, his head close to the plate, preoccupied with food and, at the same time, thinking of what had to be done today, exactly the way Mr. Erickson did.

"I'm not so interested in logs. But I am interested in potatoes. I wish I could drive your sprayer, but I have an important job. I left you to get that job, you know. I can't come crawling back."

Mrs. Erickson made women's talk with Shane. "It is too bad you are here too early for any berries."

"Got more than I can handle this year, Thure," Mr. Erickson said. "I need help. It ain't comin' crawlin' back, to come back to the farm. Why, I'd be proud," he stomped a foot under the table, "to come back to the farm."

"You could never pay Thure what he was worth," Mrs. Erickson said. She was standing at the wood stove frying more eggs. "He's making better money in Chicago than you could ever give him."

Erickson put his knife and fork crossways on his half-finished plate of food and twisted around to look at his wife. "How can you talk that way, when you know I need help . . ."

Not looking at him, Mrs. Erickson turned, smiling, to Shane. "For forty-two years he managed all right, somehow. He'll get along without no more help this year." By the way Mrs. Erickson talked, she seemed to be reassuring Shane that Thure was not needed on the farm, that he would go back to Chicago with her tomorrow. Mrs. Erickson, a slight, wiry little woman, tended the frying eggs. Mr. Erickson picked up his knife and fork and began eating again, thinking of what a good hand Thure would have been on his farm.

"I must go back to Chicago to my job," Thure said.

"There!" Mrs. Erickson turned and smiled happily.

"Never mind," Mr. Erickson said. "Tell yuh what. I got a couple new stories . . ."

Thure had explained to Shane what a good storyteller Mr. Erickson was. She quietly put down her fork and waited.

"Funny thing." The farmer had finished his breakfast. Taking off his hat, he sat back in the kitchen chair.

"Funny thing happened here last hunting season. Fellow named Starkey come up from Chicago to get a deer. Well, you know how it is with them fellows," he looked at Shane, his brows raised, asking for agreement. She nodded and looked at Thure, laughing. "They come up with the latest rigs, one of them hats with a shade in front and a shade in back, and they wear high boots." He raised first one knee and then the other, "With woolly socks turned neat over the tops. Oh, and they got fancy jackets and all kinds of things. Then, of course, they spend all their time to the saloon in town." There was a pause.

That was the end of the first part of the story. "Well, so Starkey got drunk." He lowered his voice on the word, drunk, to make it seem delicate for the nice little Irish girl. "And he was having a whale of a good time, but it worried him he wasn't getting no deer. A fellow come in the place, long about the middle of the afternoon and happen to tell him one of my boys, Arvid, shot a deer out here at our place, and this Starkey from Chicago got excited." End of the second part.

"First thing I know, a Ford comes travelin' up to the farm, right up to the granary, and this Starkey and another fellow jump out and come running up to Arvid and me. We was looking at the deer. 'How much you want for him?' Starkey yelled before we hardly had a chance to look the fellow over. '\$25,' Arvid says, and the fellow yells, 'Sold!' So then what he did! He put his hands in the neck of the deer and let the blood clear over his sleeves. He smeared it all over himself, got some blood on them fancy high-top boots, and he wiped his bloody fingers on the front of his fancy hunting jacket. After he was done with smearing the blood, he run back to the car and took out his rifle. It was loaded. He shot it off in the pine trees three times. Then they tied the deer on the front fender and away they went. And Arvid and I wouldn't dare laugh until Starkey and the other fellow drove away, because they was drunk. But afterwards we laughed good and Arvid with his \$25 decided he would get drunk, too." End of the third part.

"What them fellows did." Mr. Erickson chuckled while Thure and Shane waited for the end of the story before they laughed good. No telling how many times Mrs. Erickson had heard it before, but she was smiling because she knew what was coming. "They drove out to Witch Lake and back to get a

little mileage on the car. Then they drove back to town, and everybody in the tavern come out to see the deer Starkey got. 'Here,' he yelled, 'some o' you guys go out all day looking for a deer and you never get a thing. I been out one hour. Guess I showed you natives.' And he had the fellow with him take pictures of him holding the shotgun on his hip and his arm around the bloody neck of the deer." He had hardly finished his story, when he turned to Shane who was still laughing. "So, you like it in Chicago," he said.

Because she was laughing, she could not answer him.

"You remember how I felt when I was in Chicago?" He turned to his wife.

"He got off the train and started walking with the crowd off the platform," she told them. "Everybody was pushing past him in such a hurry, and he got mad because he didn't know what they was hurrying for. So he held back on purpose, because they all was in such a rush."

As Mrs. Erickson told it, Shane, who had stopped laughing, listened carefully. She could see the farmer, a brand new hat on and his best suit, with the sleeves too short and his arms gangling, walk down a wooden ramp from the station to the street with all the well-dressed, cross-looking city people pushing around him. As she listened, she felt sorry for him.

"You've never been back since, have you?" Thure asked.

"No, sir! Not even for the World's Fair."

"For some reason, we must go back to Chicago tomorrow," Thure said, "but now we are going fishing."

He helped Shane put on her jacket.

They seemed anxious to get away alone, yet they didn't act like lovebirds.

"How's the sky?" she asked, as they walked down the road that led from the farm into the woods.

He looked up, squinting. "Fine. Overcast. It looks like rain."

"How 'bout the wind?"

"Oh, wind doesn't matter with perch," he said. "But it could be more still."

"Temperature?"

"Just right. Are you warm enough?"

"Oh, sure. How 'bout the moon?"

"It is waning now," he said. "I don't know if it's good this time of year or not."

"Oh, sure it is," she chattered on. "I'm a regular almanac. Ask me anythin'. It's perfect for perch right now."

As they walked through the woods, she talked constantly, as if she was afraid to let it be silent.

The birches were white ribs bending over the road. Their yellowing leaves and the dark, heavy evergreen behind them almost hid the sky. Shane stopped under a torn place in the foliage. "Looks almost like a snow sky, wouldn't you say?" she asked eagerly.

"In August?" he laughed. "Maybe it is a snow sky, Shane." When they walked out into an open field and the woods stood tall behind them, Thure said, "Now when we get to the lake, you must not talk."

"But I gotta talk."

"I'll bait your hook, and you may sit anywhere you want on the edge of the lake."

"I'm followin' you." There was a protest in her voice.

"It's a bottomless lake, and you must be careful. Your feet will get wet, I am sorry."

Their feet sank deep into the tangled, spongy bayberry and

ferns, as they walked to the lake that was bottomless right to its edge.

He put worms on their hooks. "Sit on the edge and drop it in, like this." The line etched itself momentarily on the water, and sank. Slowly, slowly the bait would be tumbling down where there was no light, only some sort of watery black retreat for small fish that skimmed and paused and skimmed, their tails waving.

They sat apart.

"How long do you stay in one place?" she shouted.

"All afternoon," he projected a whisper over the swamp that lay between them. "Don't talk."

At first, she was forced to watch the point of her line on the water and wonder what the chances were below the surface. But when nothing came, and the slight ruffling of the water was a certainty that she did not have to watch, she looked up across the lake. For a long silence, she saw the marsh on the other side of the lake, the swelling hills, the tiers of forest beyond, and then the white snow sky. Smoke-haze seemed to seep out of the sky over the last tiers of dark forest-shapes, becoming thinner and more diluted as it moved down the hills over the marsh until, before her eyes, she thought she could see it only in the reflections in the water. Thure had told her about mild, calm days in Sweden when the peace was hypnotic over the lowland stretches.

She heard the cleaving of the water and saw him stand up, pull out the fish that floundered in air, then dropped, small and shuddering, in the moss at his side.

"That's only the first," he called.

By the end of the day, they had caught ten perch. He had caught nine, and she had caught one.

"You did all right for a girl who works in a factory," Mr. Erickson had said, and she wanted to go back and catch a mess to show what she could do.

They had to leave early the next morning to catch the train. The ride to the lumber-yard village was like a movie running backwards; the stalagmite trunks of the trees and the brush-laden hills falling back in the fog, while Thure told Antela that his Irish friend had liked the North country.

Through the train windows, they saw the fog settle into the hollow places and the rivers while the sun came up, and they could tell that it was getting warmer. The fields in Wisconsin were more golden-green than they had been in Michigan, and the farther south they went, the wider were the cement highways along the train tracks.

"How I hate the dirt on trains," Shane said, "the sticky dirt, when it's hot."

Soot had settled on their luggage by the time they reached Chicago, and they carried their jackets, for it was warm. Thure led the way through the crowd and paid her fare on the bus. While she sat holding their jackets, he stood next to their seat, and they said nothing to each other, for it was noisy.

The stairway seemed narrower and darker, the lock on the door seemed lower than she remembered.

"Back so soon?" Rose and Barry were drinking beer together. "Say, you gotta tell us all about it."

"I didn't wanna leave, but Thure said we would be so tired tomorrow if we stayed any longer."

"I got a job in a factory, myself," Thure teased her.

"Me, too," she said.